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# GOD THE HOLY FATHER

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*By*

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## FOREWORD

This book is a reprint of three small books of sermons by my father for which there has been a demand for some years. They are: *The Holy Father and the Living Christ; Christian Perfection* and *The Taste of Death and the Life of Grace*. These sermons were all preached and published around the turn of the century, and before his longer books were written. Yet they are regarded as important because they give the key to all his later thinking and writing. It has been suggested to me by one who has studied his theology deeply that if the sermons were rearranged, and not merely reissued as they first appeared, they would form a logical sequence, a system of theology in small compass. This suggestion I have gratefully adopted. *The Holy Father* deals with the nature of God the Father; *The Divine Self-Emptying* with the Self-Humiliation of God the Son; *The Taste of Death and the Life of Grace* with the Sacrifice and Passion of Christ the Saviour; *The Living Christ* with Christ Risen and Alive for evermore; and *Christian Perfection* with the consequent life of the Christian.

JESSIE FORSYTH ANDREWS.

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# THE HOLY FATHER

# THE HOLY FATHER

ST. JOHN xvii. 11.

WHEN the 103rd Psalm says, "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him," it comes home to a time like our own. It is one of those gleams of vision in which the soul of Israel outran the spirit of its age. It transcended its own genius. It rose from the covenant God to the father God. It uttered an *intuition* whose source was *inspiration*, and which in the fulness of time rose into the *revelation* of God's first and last relation to the world. The music, heart, and passion of it lives for ever in Christ—endless pity, endless promise, endless power—lingering, searching pity, loving and lifting promise, weariless power and peace.

But it points beyond itself. There is a height and a depth in the Father beyond His utmost pity and His kindest love. He is *Holy* Father and Redeemer, and it is His holiness of fatherhood that is the source of our redemption and sonship. It is not their obstacle. "Thou, O Lord, art our Holy One, *therefore* we shall not die." He is father of pity to human weakness, still more father of grace to human sin, but chiefly father of holy joy to our Lord Jesus Christ. The New Testament name and idea of God is not simply "Our Father", but "the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." And Christ's own prayer was "Holy Father". That was Christ's central thought of God, and He knew God as He *is*. The new revelation in the cross was more than "God is love". It was this "Holy Father". That is, God at His divinest, as He was *to* Christ, as He was *in* Christ.

In the Old Testament God is father often enough as well as in other faiths. And in the 103rd Psalm it appears in a more original and tender way than I can stop to point out. But it is with many limitations. The name, for instance, is as yet imported into God rather than revealed from Him. He *is like* a

father more than He *is* a father. And He is Israel's father only. "Them that fear Him" means Israel. But the chief limitation is this. The name is not yet evangelized. Fatherhood is not yet brought into direct connection with holiness, sin, sacrifice, redemption—only with weakness. The pity of the Father is connected with the allusion to our frail frame in those few verses, not with our transgression and the forgiveness which is the burden of the psalm. God is Father, and He is holy, but it is not as Holy Father that He redeems. Fatherhood in the Old Testament neither demands sacrifice nor makes it, but in the New Testament the Holy Father does both. The holiness is the root of love, fatherhood, sacrifice, and redemption.

The ethical standard is becoming supreme with us to-day, not only in conduct, but also in theology. We may welcome the change. It carries us farther—to a standard truly spiritual. It plants us on God's holiness as His perfect nature, His eternal spirit, His ruling self and moving centre. We have been over-engrossed with a mere distributive equity, which has made God the Lord Chief Justice of the world. Or we have recoiled from that to a love slack and over-sweet. But this lifts us up to a more spiritual and personal standard, to the Fatherly holiness whose satisfaction in a Holy Son is the great work and true soul of Godhead. The divine Father is the holy. And the Holy Father's first care is holiness. The first charge on a Redeemer is satisfaction to that holiness. The Holy Father is one who does and must atone. Atonement wears a new glory when read in Christ's own light. We see it flowing in grief *from that very holiness* of the Father to which it returns in praise. As Holy Father He is the eternal Father and maker of sacrifice no less than of man. He offers a sacrifice rent from His own heart. It is made to Him by no third party ("for who hath first given unto Him"), but by Himself in His Son; and it is made to no foreign power, but to His own holy nature and law. Fatherhood is not bought from holiness by any cross; it is holiness itself that pays. It is love that expiates. "Do not say, 'God is love. Why atone?' The New Testament says, 'God has atoned. What love!' " The ruling passion of the Saviour's holy God is this passion to atone and to redeem.

All this and more is in that "*Holy Father*", which is the last

word in the naming of God. The Church of to-day has gained greatly in its sense of the *love* of God. There are still greater things waiting when she has moved on as far again, to that *holiness* whose outward movement is love, which love is but the passion to impart. You can go behind love to holiness, but behind holiness you cannot go. It is the true consuming fire. Any real belief in the Incarnation is a belief in the ultimacy, centrality, and supremacy of holiness for God and man. We may come to holiness by way of love, but we only come to love by reason of holiness. We may be all aglow for the coming of the kingdom, but there is a prior petition. It is the kingdom's one condition, "Hallowed be Thy Name". That hallowing was done in Christ's death which founded the kingdom. We are in some danger of inverting the order of these prayers to-day. "Thy kingdom come" is not the first petition. The kingdom comes from the satisfaction of holiness. It does not make it. "God is Love" is not the whole gospel. Love is not evangelical till it has dealt with holy law. In the midst of the rainbow is a throne. There is a kind of consecration which would live close to the Father, but it does not always take seriously enough the holiness which *makes* the fatherhood of the cross—awful, inexhaustible, and eternal, as full of judgment as of salvation.

We cannot put too much into that word Father. It is the sum and marrow of all Christian divinity. It is more than natural paternity spiritualised. It is a supernatural word altogether when the cross becomes its key. But we may easily put into it too little. That is what we all do in some way. Only once has enough been put into it. And that was in the faith and work of Christ, "Father, forgive them." "Father"—that was His faith. "Forgive them"—that was His work. The soul of divine fatherhood is forgiveness by holiness. It is evangelical. It is a matter of grace meeting sin by sacrifice to holiness, more even than of love meeting need by service to man. To *correct* and revive that truth, to restore it to its place in the proportion of faith, would be to restore passion to our preaching, solemnity to our tenderness, real power to our energy, and moral virility to our piety. Our piety is too weak in in the face of the virile passions it should rule. The chief lack of religion to-day is authority; and it must find that in the cross or

nowhere, in the real nature of the cross, in its relation to the holy demand of God.

We put too little into that word Father, either when we think below the level of natural fatherhood, or when we rise no higher than that level.

## I

By thinking below that level; when we do not rise to regard God as Father at all.

Few of us now make that mistake in theory. But most do in practice. Their *practical* thought of God is not always as Father even if they speak much of the Fatherhood. By practical I mean what really and experimentally affects their religion, colours their habit of soul, moulds their silent tone of mind, helps and sustains their secret heart. They treat God as power, judge, king, providence of a sort. He is for them at most a rectorial Deity. But it is the few perhaps who in their living centre and chronic movement of the soul experience sonship as the very tune of their heart, the fashion and livery of their will. Most Christians are not worldlings, but they are hardly sons. They are only in the position of the disciples who stood between Judaism and Pentecost, who received Christ but had not as yet the Holy Ghost. They are not sons but have only received power to become sons. The fatherhood has not broken out upon them through the cross and caught them away into its universal heaven. The great mass of religion, real and practical as it may be, is not yet sonship. It is more or less earnest, active, compassionate. It is Catholic or it is Protestant; it is ecclesiastical, political or pietist; it is eager for the kingdom and set on some form of God's will. Its philanthropy ranges from the deepest and most devoted sacrifice to a kind of charity which is mainly institutional, fashionable, heartless, and on the way to become as hollow as Dickens in his one-eyed way saw it might be. But what it does not enough realise in experience (the preacher himself accuses his own) is the centre and summary of God's will and kingdom, the fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. But prior to the true doing of the will is the trusting of

it. "This is the will of God that ye should believe in His Son Jesus Christ." This is His commandment that we should love—really love, and not simply do the works which are inspired and suggested by those who have loved.

But to dwell on that is happily no longer the chief need of the hour.

## II

We put too little into the name Father, when we think no higher than natural fatherhood at its heavenly best. It was not by a father or all earth's fatherhood that God revealed Himself. That would have been but manifestation, not revelation. It was by a son and a cross—whose message is the true supernatural of the world. What I mean is that we make too little of the Father when we do not rise beyond *love* to *grace*—which is holy love, suffering hate and redeeming it. The true supernatural is not the miraculous, but the miracle for whose sake miracles exist. It is not prodigy in nature but the grace of God in history. It has no direct relation to natural law. Miracle is not a scientific idea but a religious. An event is a miracle not by its relation to law but to grace. The Incarnation would be equally a miracle, however Jesus entered the world. It is not nature that is the true region of the supernatural, but history; and history not as a chain of events, but as the spiritual career of the soul or of the race. That is the true region of the supernatural. It lies in the action of God's will upon men's wills, not upon natural law. It is the work of God's grace upon men's sin. The miracle of the world is not that God should love His children or even His prodigals. Do not even the publicans likewise? But it is that He should love, forgive, and redeem His enemies; that His heart should atone for them to His own holy nature; that He should consecrate, a suffering greater even than they devised, all the suffering they might have to endure; and by their central sin and its judgment destroy sin at its centre. That would be miracle if nature's laws were no more. That is Fatherhood when we speak of God. That is the the fatherhood whose life, motive, and security is holiness. That fatherhood is the one mystery and miracle. To nature it is abso-

lutely foreign, impossible, and incredible. Of all things it is least a matter of course. It is a matter of conflict, of conquest, of revelation, credible only by the aid of the spirit that inspired it. It is the fatherhood of the cross, with the grace which that fatherhood shows, and the atonement it finds.

Between us and the Holy Father there comes what does not come between us and any earthly father—sin. Sin, hell, curse, and wrath! The wrath and curse of God not on sin only, but on the soul. O you may correct the theology of it as you will, but you cannot wipe—not all the perfumes of progress can hide—the reality of these things from the history of the soul, or from its future. They abide with us because the Holy Father will not leave us, because grace is the "hound of heaven". They are a function of that holiness which is love's own ground of hope. We do not and cannot SIN against natural fatherhood, however ill we may treat it. Sin is unknown to nature, to natural relations, natural love. Nature includes no holiness; and it is holiness that makes sin sin. It was not against his father that the prodigal *sinned*; and his treatment is not the whole sum of sin's cure. He truly says "I have sinned *against* heaven and *before* thee"—*against* heaven, but only *before* his father. It is not the whole fulness of the Gospel that we have in that priceless parable. Christianity is the religion of redemption, and it is not redemption we have there, only forgiveness. If it were the whole, then Christ could be dispensed with in the Gospel, for He is not there. And the father is not put before us as a *holy* father, but as good, patient, wise, and infinitely kind—a magnified and most natural man. He does not stand for the whole of God, nor even for the whole grace of God. He stands not at all for the *cost* to a Holy God of His grace, but only for the utter freeness of it. Nor is He presented as Trustee of the world's moral order, of History's destiny, of Humanity's moral soul and future, or of Eternity's holy law. He feels but personal grief and wounded affection. It is an individual matter; and redemption is not. It is a matter between two individuals, and redemption is not. A soul can neither be saved nor sanctified without a world. To redeem, the sin must be destroyed, a universe re-organised. Yet the treatment of a world of sin, a sinful race, does not here arise. Nor are any steps taken by the father to

cause repentance. And it is a question altogether whether the leading motive in the parable historically did not lie in the elder brother and his treatment; whether its centre of gravity is not at the close; whether that is not the foreground which called the picture into existence, and for whose sake the wonderful background is there.

We put too little into fatherhood then if we treat it simply as boundless, patient, waiting, willing love. It is more than the love which accepts either beneficence (like Faust's) as repentance, or repentance as atonement, and eagerly cuts confession short thus—"Let us say no more about it. Pray do not mention it. Let bygones be bygones." Forgiveness, fatherhood, *for the race*, does not mean, with all its simplicity, just a clean page and a fresh start and a sympathetic allowance for things. God does not forgive "everything considered". To understand all is not to forgive all. That is mere literary ethics, not the moralist's, certainly not the Christian theologian's. There was more fatherhood in the cross (where holiness met guilt) than in the prodigal's father (where love met shame). There was more fatherhood for our souls in the desertion of the cross than in that which melts our hearts in the prodigal's embrace. It is not a father's sensitive love only that we have wounded, but His holy law. Man is not a mere runaway, but a rebel; not a pitiful coward, but a bold and bitter mutineer. Does not Kant confess as a moralist the radical evil in man, and Carlyle speak of his infinite damnability? There is many a living Mephistopheles in Europe. And the horror of the cursed, cursed, cursed Sultan* belongs to the human race—to the solidarity of the race. "Miserable sinners", which the slight individualist boggles at in his prayers, is a poor confession when we remember that we are voicing in our public worship the sin of the race. Forgiving is not just forgetting. It is not cancelling the past. It is not mere amnesty and restoration. There is something broken in which a soul's sin shatters a world. Such is a soul's grandeur, and so great is the fall thereof; so seamless is the robe of righteousness, so ubiquitous and indefectible the moral order which makes man man. Account must be had, somewhere and by somebody, of that holiness of God which is the dignity of fatherhood and soul of manhood.

* Abdul Hamid, for the Armenius atrocities, 1895-6.

There are debts that cannot simply be written off and left unrecovered. There is a spiritual order whose judgments are the one guarantee for mankind and its future. That law of holiness can by no means whatever be either warned off or bought off in its claim. God cannot simply *waive* it as to the past, nor is it enough if He simply *declare* it for all time. In His own eternal nature it has an undying claim to which He must *give effect* in due judgment somewhere, if He is to redeem a world. The enforcement of God's holiness by judgment is as essential to a *universal and eternal* Fatherhood as is the outflow of His love. It was not cursed suffering only that fell on the Saviour, it was holy judgment. The Holy Father dealt there with the world's sin on (not in) a world-soul. God in Christ judged sin as a Holy Father seeking penalty only for holiness' sake. He gathered it in one there, and brought it to issue, focused thus, with His unity of holy law. The misery and death which the sinner bears blindly, sullenly, resentfully, was there understood with the understanding of Holy God; the guilt was seen as God sees it; the judgment was accepted as God's udgment, borne, owned and glorified before the world as holy, fatherly, just, and good. That final witness of holiness to holiness amid sin's last wreck, penalty, and agony—that is expiation as the Father made it in the Son, not changing His *feeling*, but by crisis, by judgment, eternally changing His *relations* with the world.

## III

It is at once easier and harder for God to forgive than man. Harder, because He is holy and feels the wound; easier, because He is holy and feels the moral power. In any case it is beyond us. It involves a sacrifice which costs more than sin-struck souls could pay. Sin steadily maims the sense of holiness and the power of sacrifice to it. And even if man by any sacrifice, or even penitence, could mend the moral order he has broken, it would be royal for him no more. It would be supreme and commanding for him no more. If we could heal our own conscience, it would no more be our king. If we could satisfy the moral order we disturbed, our insufferable self-satisfaction would derange it

straightway. We should be (as Luther said) "the proudest jackasses under heaven". We may sorrow and amend, but we cannot atone and reconcile. Why, we cannot atone to each other, to our own injured or neglected dead, for instance, our silent inaccessible dead. I think of Carlyle's stricken widowerhood. Neither by hand nor heart can we come at them, nor bring them a whole lone life's amends. Our jealous God monopolises the right of atoning to them for us. We cannot even beseech their forgiveness. We cannot offer them ours. We cannot pray to them, we can but pray *for* them. We can but pray God to atone to them for us. We may live, like Carlyle, to eighty in a long, penitent widowerhood, and *then* we cannot atone to our wronged or lonely dead, nor smooth a feather of the angels who tarried with us, and we never knew them for angels till they had flown. And there may be broken hearts that live on sweetly to forgive their seducer, but which he can never mend, he can never atone. Nay, we cannot atone to our own souls for the wrong we have done them. We sin—and for us inexpiably—against our own souls. How much less, then, can we atone to our injured, neglected, sin-stung God. If our theology would let us, our conscience would not. The past cannot be erased, cannot be altered, cannot be repaired. There it stands. It can only be atoned; and never by us. If our repentance atoned, it would lose the humility which makes it worth most. It is atonement that makes repentance, not repentance that makes atonement. No man can save his brother's soul—no, nor his own. When Christ knew and said that He could, He knew Himself to be more than man. Man's debt no man can pay. Even God could not just cancel it. None could pay it but the prodigal's Father for him. For the debt was obedience, holiness, not suffering. Penalty only expiates crime, not sin. There was owed that debt to holiness, that atonement to holiness which is so misconstrued when we make it due to justice, or demanded by justice alone. Justice wants penalty, holiness wants holiness in the midst of penalty. It wants a soul's own perfect holiness in the midst of penalty due to other souls; it wants loving obedience amid the penalty of loveless defiance. God alone could fulfil for us the holy law He never broke, and pay the cost He never incurred.

And He has paid it, so freely and completely that His grace in forgiving is as full and free to us as if it had cost Him nothing, as if it had been just kindness. The cost is so perfectly and freely borne that it never appears in a way to mar the graciousness of grace, or deflower the Father's love. The quality of mercy is not strained.

That artist who works with such consummate ease, swiftness, and grace, how did he come by it? By hours and years of cost, in practice, in drudgery, slavery, self-mastery, self-sacrifice, by a life he would often describe as one of labour and sorrow more than joy. But the master's art keeps all that out of sight. The grace He offers you is not to be spoiled by the obtrusion of such cost.

The friend you receive, and think nothing in the house too good for him—do you let him know of that trouble with the cook, of those hours of wakeful contrivance by which you earn the means of spending your hospitality on him, of that weakness of body which you master every time you laugh with him, that heartache which you keep down while you make everything so pleasant for him?

So God does not mar His grace by always thrusting on us what it cost. Some part of the failure and decay of evangelicanism (not to say Christianity) is due to the glib parade and unreal obtrusion of solemnities in redemption, about which Christ and His apostles held fine reserve. Even of sin, which is a commonplace of religious talk, Christ never spoke except in connection with its forgiveness. But reserve is not denial. The parable of the Prodigal is there, like every other parable, not to embody a complete system, but to light up one point in particular, which is the *freeness* of God's grace, the grace of it, the bloom upon the Fatherhood. The parable does not teach us that this grace cost nothing, that no superhuman satisfaction was required, that atonement is a rabbinic fiction. Rabbinic! Must it be fiction because rabbinic? It comes ill from liberal thought, this railing at Rabbinism. If God was not moving in the Rabbinic thought of Christ's day, what reason have we to say He moved in Buddhism, or moves in the thought of to-day? But as to the parable, it only tells us that grace is as free as love, that it could not flow

more free if it had cost nothing, that the Almighty mastery of redemption is awful but entire, and altogether lovely. We have other reasons to know that if it had cost nothing, it could not have been so free. There is no precious freedom that costs nothing. Without blood, without cost, no remission, no release, no finding of the self, no possessing of the soul, no self-possession, no ease, grace, royalty, or liberty in the soul's matter or style. Without cross no crown for the soul. It is equally true of God and man. Grace does mean cost—but cost completely triumphantly met. Take God's grace in its fulness, richness, kindness. You cannot put too much freedom into the grace of the Father. The ease of its manner rests on the mighty gravity of its matter. Art conceals art. The art in forgiving, the utter grace of it, conceals the art of redeeming, the dread labour, sorrow, and secret of it.

## IV

Revelation has its great reserves as conditions of its power. They are not forbidden ground, but they are not flashed in our eyes. Both Christ and the New Testament are disappointingly reticent about the cost of grace, the "plan of salvation", the "theory of Atonement", the precise way and sense in which Christ bore our curse before God, and took away the guilt of the world. Yet such truth (if there be a Holy Ghost and Church) we must have and we can. The saved conscience craves it for its moral world. It is quite necessary for *the Church's* faith, and at last for the individuals'. If you never realize at all the cost of grace, you run some risk of making grace of none effect. After all, we are "scarcely saved". To go back to the parable which immortalises the freeness of grace. What should you think of the forgiven son, who, as the pardoned years went on, never took his mercy seriously enough to give a thought to what he had brought on his father or God? If he never cared to go behind that free forgiveness which met him and feasted him without an upbraiding word; if he never sought to look deep into those eyes which had followed him, watched him, and spied him so far; if he was never moved by the amazing welcome to put himself in the depths of his Father's place; if he took it all with a light

heart, and told the world that in forgiveness he felt nothing but gladness; if he said that that was all we know and all we need to know; if the swift forgiveness of God made it easy for him to forgive himself and just forget his past; if the generous, patient father never became for him the Holy Father; if he felt it was needless and fruitless to enter into the dread depths of sin with the altar candle of the Lord, or explore the miracle of the Father's grace—what should you think of him then?

Give him, of course, a year or two, if need be, to revel in this glad and sweet surprise. Give to his soul (if need be) a holy honeymoon. But if the years go on and he show no thirst to search those things which the angels desire to look into, but cannot (being unhuman and unredeemed); if he never seek to measure the latent meaning of it all for the Redeemer, and give no sign of being deepened in conscience as the fruit of being redeemed there; if there be no trace of his coming to himself in a sense still deeper than when he turned among the swine; if he go on with a mere readiness of religious emotion, and a levity of religious intelligence which cares not to measure his sin by the finer standards of the Father's spirit, or gauge the holy severity of the love he spurned; if he learn nothing of the Lord's controversy and His mortal moral strife; if he weigh nothing of the sin of the world in the scales of eternal redemption—if his career in grace were such as that, what should we think of him then? Should we not have reason to doubt whether he was not disappointing the Father again, if he was not falling from grace in another way, and this time in a religious way? He might take the genial cultured way of a natural goodness with philanthropy for repentance, an easy optimism, a beautiful Fatherhood, tasteful piety, social refinement, varied interest, ethical sympathies, æsthetic charm, and a conscience more enlightened than saved. Or he might take the pietist's way. And then is the risk fanciful of his sinking, perhaps, in the ill-educated cases, through a fluent religionist into a flimsy saint, lapped in soft airs, taking a clique for the kingdom, and sold to the religious nothings of the hour with all their stupefying power; with no deepness of earth, no pilgrim's progress, no passion of sacred blood, no grasp on real life, no grim wrestling, no power with God, no mastery of the

soul, no insight, no measure of it, no real power to retain for himself, or for others to compel a belief in the soul, its reality or its Redeemer? And even if an individual is saved from these perils of religious impressionism, a church which acted so would not escape.

## V

The parable of the Prodigal puts before us the rich freeness of God's grace in a story. But Christ Himself sets it before us in a living soul, as the living grace eternal in our midst. Did Christ utter His whole self in that parable, His whole mind and experience of His work, His whole sense of the depths and heights of sin, grace and glory? If He was the great gospel, could He put His whole self into any parable? No, nor into all the parables and all the precepts taken together. There came, when words had proved fruitless for teaching, and parables failures, the last great enacted parable of the Supper, the last great prayers of the garden, and the last great miracles of the cross and the tomb. When Christ came to these things, do you think there was no more in His mind about the cost of Fatherhood than He put into the story of His prodigal? There was a world more. Peter years after spoke, as the Lord the Spirit taught him, of the costly blood of Christ. And it is a strain repeated in the thought of every apostle. Indeed, they saw the life and words of Christ, not only irradiated by His death, but in the radiance even lost or obscured. *The* word of the gospel was not so much the words of Jesus as the one compendiary word of the cross showing forth the righteousness of God, and doing a work *for* us which is the source and ground of any work *in* us. The mere space given to the Passion in the gospels shows that to the company of Jesus He was more of a Mediator than even a Teacher, and that the Holy Ghost came from His cross more than from His doctrine.

Still, it remains true that from Christ Himself we have almost nothing in proportion about the holy cost of Fatherhood, the Godward action of His suffering and death. What most engrossed Him, even at the close, He said least of. It was not man's need of Him, nor His action on man. It was God's need of Him;

God's real need of His sorrow, God's holy will for His obedience, the action of His cross on the holiness of God. For Christ the first effect of His cross was not on man, else He would have had more to say about it. It was on the Father. And at the end that grew His closest concern. Yet He has little or nothing to say of it for our theological satisfaction. We have but a word or two to show that the nature of the cross and atonement was prayer, that the act into which He put His whole life and soul was in its essence prayer—a dealing with God. We have but a few words wrung from the agony of this clear, sure, resolute, silent man, though in keeping with the attitude of His whole life. But a few words—and these only as it were overheard, not said for transmission, and, like ourselves, "scarcely saved". It is a reticence which is only intelligible if the Son was dealing with the Father in an objective way, apart from the effect of His act and agony upon us. It is in some contrast with the tone of the epistles, reticent as they are. And it has moved the humanism of the day to dispute the entire legitimacy of the succession between epistle and gospel, to rescue the Christ of the gospels from the Christ of the epistles, to save Christ from Paul, and Christ's religion from New Testament Rabbinism.

Well, I will leave on one side the suggestion that the disciples did not understand enough of Christ's words about His death to remember them all as they might. I will not say there is nothing in the suggestion. The gospels were not meant for a finished portrait of Christ, or a complete manual of His truth. They were but supplementary in their origin. It is unhistoric to treat them as sole and complete. They were written for people who had already received the gospel, or had the epistles, in order to fill out their knowledge of Christ. They were less to convey saving knowledge than to enrich it, because the apostles were passing away and leaving no successors behind. Besides, we must remember when we think of the disproportion in the contents of these small memoirs that though we need Christ's work of grace *more*, we need His tenderness and His teaching *oftener* in the Christian life. The *weight* of the gospels is in their compressed close. But whatever may be in such suggestions is not all. I venture to offer one or two considerations of a different kind in explanation.

## VI

It would not be like the grace of God, it would be *un*gracious, if He came forgiving man and yet laying more stress on what it cost Him to do it than His joy, fulness, and freedom in doing it. You find poor human creatures who never can overlook your mistake without conveying to you that it is as much as they can do. They think no little of themselves for doing it. They take care that you shall never forget their magnanimity in doing it. They keep the cost of your forgiveness ever before you. And the result is that it is not forgiveness at all. How miserable a thing it is instead! How this spirit takes the charm from the reconciliation! How it destroys the grace of it! How penurious the heart it betrays! How it shrivels the magnanimity it parades! How grudging, how ungodlike it is! How unfatherly! What an ungracious way of dealing with the graceless!

That is not God's way of forgiveness. His Fatherhood has the grand manner. It has not only distinction, but delicacy. He leaves us to *find out* in great measure what it cost—slowly, with the quickened heart of the forgiven, to find that out. Christ never told His disciples He was Messiah till it was borne in on them by contact with Him. He never told them till, by the working of the actual Messiahship upon them, they found it out. Revelation came home to them as discovery. It burst from experience. So gracious is God with His revelation that He actually lets it come home to us as if we had discovered it. That is His fine manner—so to give as if we had found. His shining may even be forgotten in our seeing. And so in a way with our forgiveness it dawns on us Its freedom gives us the power to see its cost. The crown of the new life is the power not only to enjoy it but to prize it. It is borne in on the forgiven. It is a truth of experience. It is reconciliation taking account of itself. The first condition of forgiveness is not an adequate comprehension of the Atonement, and a due sense of the cost. That is not saving faith. Any adequate idea on that head comes only to the saved. The cross becomes a theology only by beginning as a religion. The condition of forgiveness is answering the grace and freedom of it with a like free, humble, and joyful heart. It is taking the freedom of it home,

and not the cost. It is committing ourselves to God's self-committal to us. It is taking God at His word—at His living word, Christ—His urgent, reticent, gracious, masterful word, Christ.

It was left to the redeemed, to His apostles especially, sanctified by a new life, vision, and measure of all things, it was left to all the faithful as their true successors, to dwell on the costly side of the Christ's work, to draw out the hidden wealth of the Father's grace, and the demands of the Father's nature in Christ's cross, and to magnify what the Fatherhood cost both Father and Son. It was indeed even then the teaching of Christ. The earthly Christ was not the all of Christ. The whole Christ was there, but not all that is in Christ. *Totus Christus sed non totum quod in eo est*, says Calvin. He taught Paul in the spirit as truly as He taught the disciples in the flesh. And in Paul He had perhaps a more teachable disciple than they were—a more sensitive pupil, a more adequate soul, and possibly even on points a more trusty reporter of His truths than they. There is an insight into the meaning of His work opened up by the humbled and grateful experience of those first saints whom that work re-made. And they certainly confess that it was the work of the cross more than the words of His mouth that made them what they were. The cross produced in them its own commentary, theology, and exposition And it was left to them to provide that theology as the exposition not of a theme, but of the life and spirit which took possession of them from the cross.

And is that not just as it should be? It is for the redeemed to magnify the cost, the preciousness, of redeeming grace. It is not for the Redeemer. It would be ungracious in Him to do so. He brought the grace to us, and brought it as grace, not as cost; He offered it as a finished thing, rich and ripe, in its fulness and freeness of beauty, love, sorrow, and searching power. For Him to dwell on the cost, who paid it, and to do so while paying it would have been to rob grace of its graciousness, to impair its wonder, amplitude, and spell. But would it not have been just as ungracious, as much of a reflection on grace, if it had made no apostle or saint leap forward, to go behind the constraining liberating, re-creating *charm* of grace, and to draw out for our

worship the cost of it—what holy Fatherhood paid in forgiving and what He was too generous to obtrude, till it pricked the conscience and woke the wonder of the forgiven? To dwell on that would have been inconsistent with the humility of Christ, or the reserve which is half the power of His revelation. But not to dwell on it or pierce into it in hushed joy would have been just as inconsistent with the true humility and gratitude of the forgiven.

## VII

And this leads me to the second consideration. The doer of a great deed is one who has least to say about it, however he may instruct those who are called to tell of it. Christ came not to *say* something, but to *do* something. His revelation was action more than instruction. He revealed by redeeming. The thing He did was not simply to make us aware of God's disposition in an impressive way. It was not to *declare* forgiveness. It was certainly not to *explain* forgiveness. And it was not even to *bestow* forgiveness. It was to *effect* forgiveness, to set up the relation of forgiveness both in God and man. You cannot set up a relation between souls without affecting and changing both sides, even if on one side the disposition existed before, and led to the act that reconciled. The great mass of Christ's work was like a stable iceberg. It was hidden. It was His dealing with God, not man. The great thing was done with God. It was independent of our knowledge of it. The greatest thing ever done in the world was done out of sight. The most ever done for us was done behind our backs. Only it was we who had turned our backs. Doing this *for us* was the first condition of doing anything *with* us.

Now the doers of these great deeds have little to say of them. They are not speechless, not meaningless, but silent men. Heroes are not their own heralds. The Redeemer was not His own apostle. He spoke most of His Father, much of Himself as His Father's Son, little of His achievements, and of the pain and cost of them next to nothing at all.

The more the Gospel says to us, the more we are impressed with its silence. There is a form of the thirst for souls, of religious

eagerness, of evangelical haste and pious impatience which is far too voluble and active to be impressive. It is more youthful than faithful, more ardent than sagacious, more energetic than inspired. It would express everything and at once in word or deed. They forgot that the ardent lucid noon hides the solemn stars, and heaven's true majesty of night, no less than does the thickest cloud. Of this there is no sign in Christ. His institutions were not devised in the interest of the world's speedy evangelization. He could wait for the souls He redeemed as well as for the God He revealed. The waiting energy of the Church is just as faithful as its forward movements, and at certain times more needful. Faith has ever a holy indifference and a masterly negligence which rest on the infinitude of divine care and the completeness of Christ's work.

Christ exhibited God, He did not expound Him. He was His witness, not His apologist. He acted on God and for God; He was a power more than a prophet, and a prophet more than a polemist. He did more to reveal than to interpret. And His revelation was in work more than in word, in a soul more than a scheme. He gave a living Spirit more than a living truth, the Holy Spirit more than a vital principle. In Him God gave Himself, He did not explain Himself. He *was* the revelation, He did not elaborate it. To see Him was to see the Father, not to see how He could be the Father. We have the benefit of the achievement. We love and trust its doer. We might trust Him less if He had more to say about it. Our faith is trust in Christ who died, rather than trust in the faith of a Christ. It is trust in a Christ who effected forgiveness by His work, not who explained forgiveness in His word, or kept His act incessantly in our ears. It was not for the Redeemer to be eloquent, or even explicit, about His own work. He did it, and it acts for ever. It set up no new affection in God, but a new and creative relation on both sides of the spiritual world. It gave man a new relation to God, and God, a new relation, though not a new feeling to man. It did not make God our Father, but it made it possible for the Father to treat sinners as sons.

But the great crisis itself transpired in the secret place of the Most High; and the silence of the gospels reflects the Saviour's

own reserve. It is the stillness of a quiet, earnest, strong, retiring man. Yea, it is the silence of the unworldly and unseen, the shadow of the holiest, the gaze of the Cherubim, the hush of the great white throne, of holy wars in high places, of far off spiritual things—slow, subtle, solemn, spiritual things. The silence of the first creation no man heard or saw. That silence is repeated in the second. It is the silence of the moving heavens, of the rising sun, of the Resurrection in the cool, dim dawn of the Church's faith and love, of all the mightiest action of the Holy Ghost—yea, of His witness borne in your hearts in this hour when I speak these holy names and presume to call these awful powers. If ye call upon the Father, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear—in reverent and godly fear. For this holy Fatherhood is at its heart the consuming fire.

## VIII

I add, with some misgiving, one consideration more. The reserve of Christ in the gospels is part of the silence and isolation which filled the cup of His suffering. He had nobody to speak to about it. Nobody could understand. He had no Paul among His disciples. Peter and John were not yet born into this. Yea, at the last the Father Himself grew silent to Him, and communion ceased, though faith and prayer did not. Sigh or brief soliloquy alone remained. He had to consume the smoke of His own torment and ours. His lonely silence was a needful part of His precious agony, of His suffering work. It was a condition of His work's success. Its dumb submission was essential to His complete practical recognition of the holiness of the judgment He bore. It was part of that perfect obedient praise of the Father's righteousness which rose in human extremity from His faith and love. There was more praise in the tenacity of this dumb solitude than when He rejoiced in spirit and said: "I thank Thee, O O Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth." It was holiness owning holiness under the *unspeakable* load of human guilt. It was an essential part of the holy judgment He bore, that it should be borne alone with the Father veiled, the future veiled, and (may I say) with some *explicit* sense veiled to Himself of that value which

the occultation of His glory and knowledge was having for God and for man. Yes, it was, perhaps, part of His work's perfect glory *not* to know, to be silent in the agony of knowing only the Father's will and not the Father's way. His self-emptying meant self-limitation in knowledge as in other things. I have already applied to Christ's consciousness the words which Calvin applies to His ubiquity: "The whole Christ was there, but not all that is in Christ was there." And this repudiation of entire knowledge may well have been a vital element in the agony of the great act. It was an act that drew not upon His theology, but on the spiritual resources of His moral personality in its superhuman obedience and trust. His silence may have been due to voluntary ignorance, to nescience by holy and omnipotent consent. It was, perhaps, the abyss of His self-emptying, the triumph of His superhuman humiliation, His utter exercise of those self-imposed limitations which made His incarnation, the negative exertion of His will's omnipotence in all that was needful to redeem. It was perhaps His power through positive trust to curb the passion to know, His acquiescence by faith in some theological ignorance, His consent not *explicitly* to see *how* His mortal obedience expiated and redeemed, His certainty only that it did, that the Holy Father had need of it for His holiness, for His kingdom, for His sons. Had He seen all, He could have suffered but little. To have known in detail at that hour the whole meaning, power, and effect of His sorrow would have been to quench it in the glory that could really only come with salvation, when He had sounded its darkness and risen on the other side. The tree of knowledge is not the tree of life.

And so this silence was the draining of sorrow's cup. To see all would be to suffer none. And to utter suffering is to escape some. To confide it is to ease it. To die alone is the death in death. Silence is sorrow's crown of sorrow, and can be more pathetic than death. And the silence of the gospels reflects the Saviour's true dying, His utter suffering, His nescience, His loneliness, His certainty in darkness, His trust, His perfect obedience. As the brevity of His life was part of His greatness, so the lack in the gospels is the condition of their greater perfection; it is a part of their completeness as a reflection of the Redeemer. And

the silence of both reflects the awful silence, the hiding of the Father and the future which was the crowning condition of redemption, and the last worst test of holy obedience and dying trust. It was not the Father's anger but His holy love, unspeakable by word or look, to be uttered only by deed, by Resurrection. As Christ's love could only speak silently at last in the *act* and mystery of dying, so God could only answer silently in the mysterious *act* of raising Him from the dead. And this was more than comforting Him in death, for it was raising Him from death's utmost desolation, from death comfortless, the deadliest death, death's sharpest sting and utmost power. Deep called unto deep, and the Will that died addressed and evoked the Will that raised Him up again in silent antiphon which is now the standing balance and order of the spiritual world for ever.

So it did not become the Captain of our salvation to say much about the cost of His grace or the agony of Fatherhood. And it did become the saved to say very much about it indeed. And it becomes the Church always not only to enjoy the Father's grace, but to learn to prize it. We must gain some reasonable sense of the mystery we cannot fathom. We must weigh the gravity of sin in the face of holiness, for the sake of worshipping the Saviour's grace, and love's earnestness about its holy law. It is not in this effort that the Church has departed from the Holy Ghost or gone back from the teaching of the gospels. The Church may wander far; but, as even Goethe said, she must ever return to adjust her compass at the cross. She cannot rest satisfied with the impressionism of the cross. The cross is not there just for religious effect. The Church takes her moral bearings there. She discovers God's moral world and authority there. She reconstructs man's conscience from there, from the word, revelation and nature of the cross, not its sound and music and effect alone. In an instinct so central, so persistent as this, has the Church been misled? Then either she has not had the Holy Ghost, or the Holy Ghost in her has been false to the work of Christ and its true nature and power.

## IX

We put too little, therefore, into the Fatherhood of God if we say He is the Father of us sinners without more ado, that nothing beyond our repentance was due to His holiness, that His love could be trusted if He let His holiness go, that He could show His heart's affections by simply choosing not to press His nature's demands.

We put too little into Fatherhood none the less if we think that the satisfaction of Christ was the source and cause of the Father's grace instead of its fruit.

And we likewise put too little into it if we dwell on the cost of forgiveness to God till we lose all sense of the grace in grace, its fulness, freedom, and spell, its tenderness, patience, and utter magnanimity with us.

But too much no son of man can put into that hallowed Fatherhood which is the whole of God and the fulness of Christ. It is the very nature and totality of Godhead, and the source of man's redemption. Its solemn love is the burden of the Saviour's bloody passion, and it is the consecration of man's red-ripe passion for man. No name so fits our whole soul's whole God. Humanism has nothing so human, Christ has nothing so superhuman as this "*Holy Father*". It wraps the world like the warm waters of the cleansing sea. They touch the horrors of the nether earth below, and above reflect the heaven's endless smile. It is ever like

> The moving waters at their priest-like task
> Of pure ablution round earth's human shores.*

We cannot simplify it on that name, we cannot exhaust it. It is the deepest name and the dearest. It speaks to child, maid, and man. It is the tenderest, sternest, broadest, most sublime. It stamps our humanest part as our godliest. The life of home, country, humanity, of church and kingdom, of action, passion, conscience, our human ties and duties, tender or heroic—that is what now bears God's monogram in us—the moral soul with

* Keats, Sonnet, *Bright Star.*

all its love, care, grace, devotion, grandeur, woe and joy. The old dear names in their new creation are the divinest still, and the nearest at our need. They are the holiest and most human too. Father, mother, wife, child, lover and maid—that is the old story of which the world never grows weary. Of the tale of romance and of renunciation we do not weary. Two lovers whispering by an orchard wall, these weeping their first-born dead or lost, these chilled and estranged for ever, or these at last grown grey and sleeping together at the foot of the hill—such things outlast in their interest for us all the centuries of human care and crime. They outlive our folly, noise and sin, earth's triumph, glories, failures, fevers and frosts. But not only so. They are immortal also in God. They are hid with Christ in God. Eternity does not draw a sponge over the heart. Our great passions are laid up beneath the altar of the Father's passion to redeem. They are smoothed out there where all crooked things are made straight. For us with our faith in Christ's Holy Father, love is not what the pessimists make it—Nature duping the individual in the interests of the species. It belongs to the eternal. Our brief life translates passion into affection, and our affections into moral worth. It spiritualizes, consecrates them. If life do that, how much more eternity! If life can thus reveal, wherefore not death? If life hallow, how much more does God the Holy! It is His own life that flows in these undying loves and ties. They will not give us the Father, but the Holy Father gives us them a thousandfold. Their perpetual song is but the echo of the Spirit, the murmur in the winding heart of the solemn, ceaseless river, which gladdens the city of God, and its fulness is the music of the world. Our first love and our last, its young dream and its old sorrow, are eternalised in our Alpha and Omega, the Eternal Father, the Holy Redeemer. *There* also is the fountain of the sainthood that weds mankind, has the world for its parish, and lays down its life for those who are neither kith nor kin but thankless and evil. Holy Father! It means a household God in a house not made with hands, the king of a righteous kingdom of loving hearts, a social God with a social gospel, a triune God who is an eternal home and society in Himself. Love, loss, fatherhood, motherhood, wifehood, widowhood, home, country, and the heroisms

that renounce these, are all eternal in the heavens. They are embalmed for ever in the heart of the infinite Father, once bereaved of His Son, and the Eternal Son, once orphaned of His Father. That is the holy love, sure of itself, which we need to correct the malady of our over-sensitive age.

Never did human pity and affection mean so much as to-day; but neither to-day nor to-morrow will it be dear or solemn enough for that primeval, endless love of God. The grace of the Holy Eternal Father has but one image among men, and it is the holy face of Jesus and Him as crucified. The cause of the cross was not only that man was lost, nor that God is love, but also that the Father is holy. Holiness is love's end, and it is only because He is holy that His Fatherhood is inexhaustible and our loves endure. Holiness is that in the love of God which fixes it and assures it for ever. If holiness fail not, then love cannot. If it cannot be put by, then love cannot fade. The holiness which demanded that Christ should die is, by its satisfaction, our one guarantee of the love that cannot die. If God had taken His holiness lightly, how could we be sure He would never be light of love? But He that spared not His own Son, how shall He not with Him also give us all things, and be to us all things which love should crave? There never was a more tender time than the present. But when we read behind the cross, and not only feel it, the heart of fatherhood is that *moral* tenderness which is so much more than pity, which not only weeps, soothes, and helps—but forgives, and forgives as one who in forgiving has to atone and redeem. To-day we are learning new depths of that *moral* tenderness which is the soul of grace, and that *holy* kindness which is the source of Atonement. The cross has more than the moral majesty that broods on earth's solemnities, renunciations, pities, sorrows, and tragic purifications. It brought into history eternal redemption. We never understood as we do to-day the father of the child; perhaps we never were so ready to believe in the father of the prodigal. But also we never had such promise of understanding the Father of the Saviour.

The Father of our childhood and weakness we beautifully understand. Could it be put more movingly than in Coventry Patmore's poem. He had punished his little son and put him to

bed, "his mother, who was patient, being dead". Sore himself, he went to see the child, and found him asleep, with all the queer and trivial contents of a little boy's pocket set out beside him to comfort him.

> "So when that night I prayed
> To God, I wept, and said:
> Ah! when at last we lie with tranced breath,
> Not vexing Thee in death,
> And Thou rememberest of what toys
> We made our joys,
> How weakly understood
> Thy great commanded good—
> Then, Fatherly not less
> Than I whom Thou hast moulded from the clay,
> Thou'lt leave Thy wrath and say,
> 'I will be sorry for their childishness.' "

That is most sweet and poignant pathos. And it is neither too keen nor too kind for the *pity* of God to His *weak* children. It melts us. It is very sacred.

But there is a deeper, tenderer note. It is the grace of God to His prodigals and rebels. "I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions, and thy sins and thine iniquities will I remember no more." That bows us. It takes us into the Holy Place.

But One takes us behind that into the holiest of all. Deepest of all, tenderest, most solemn, glorious, silent, and eternal is the Father's joy in the Holy Son obedient on the sinful cross.

That joy is the Father's love of His own holiness. It is His blessed and only form of self-love.

It is all beyond thought, beyond poetry, beyond Scripture, beyond speech. God Himself in that mighty joy refrains from words. He could utter it only in act, in raising Christ from the dead by the spirit of holiness. He met the Son's great act by a greater. Deep answered deep. We can feel it and worship it at the last only in the power and silence of the same Holy Ghost. May He never fail us, but keep us burning unconsumed, sure, wise, kind, and strong, in His endless peace and power.

# THE DIVINE SELF-EMPTYING

## THE DIVINE SELF-EMPTYING

"Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus; who, being in the form of God, counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death." —PHIL. ii. 5-8.

THIS is one of the hardest sayings in the New Testament, because one of the greatest. All great things are hard. It takes us into a region where human thought seems to fail, human analogies break down, and human speech sounds meaningless. It has been asked, for instance, if there is any real or possible process answering to the words, "emptied Himself". Can any being divest himself of his own nature, or will himself out of his own mode of being? Moreover, can we be sure that we know exactly the allusions in Paul's mind which give point to his words and phrases? The *form* of God and the *fashion* of a man, the *fashion* of a man and the *likeness*—in what do they differ? The equality with God—was it something He had and laid down, or something He might have had, but forbore to claim? The discussion on the passage has been immense.

But do not go away from this or any other difficulty with the notion that because all is not clear, all is quite dark. Because some meanings are disputed do not suppose that all sense is hopeless and all value lost. Because we do not clearly grasp do not suppose that we cannot be mightily seized and held. Exact interpretation may be difficult, but great principles and powers may be so radiant that exactness is lost in a flood of glory, and we are apprehended of more than we apprehend.

For instance, there is the great question of limitation within the Godhead which is here raised. It is said sometimes that any kind of a limit put on Godhead is a denial of Godhead. If God accept limitation He empties Himself to the point of vacuity, And some, therefore, stumble at the idea of personality in God. because it seems to limit and narrow Him to human dimensions. While others, going further, not only fail to grasp the philosophy

of a Divine personality, but fail to respond to the reality of it, which is much more serious. Others, again, seeing the great limitations in the Christ of the gospels, cannot admit His Godhead. They see Him limited in power, and in knowledge, and in His span of life. Some things He could not do, some things He did not know, and an early limit was put by death upon a life which promised to be so great, good, and blessed. Besides, His cause moves slowly to-day in the world. It spreads at huge cost and difficulty. It looks as if it took His utmost effort to win the results we see, which seem so unsatisfactory for two thousand years of Divine action. "And is the thing we see salvation?" The limits upon His power and success seem so great, whether in His life or in His influence since, that some cannot believe in His Godhead, even when they honour His character and ideals. They think His worth far greater than His power. They think He meant more than He could do, and reached at more than He could grasp. And that, again, leads them seriously to question if worth and power will ever combine; if might will ever be on the side of right in all the order of things. They are not sure if Christ will ever be King. For to believe in Christ means to believe that His right is the final might, and to lose faith in Christ is to doubt whether right ever can or will rule in humanity at all. Belief in a righteous, glorious future for our race stands or falls, practically, with belief in Jesus Christ. If it do not for you it will for your descendants. So the question is a grave one. Are His limitations the result of weakness or of power?

### I.—LIMITATION A POWER AND NOT A DEFECT

Well, notice here that Christ's emptying of Himself is not regarded as the loss of His true Godhead, but the condition of it. Godhead is what we worship. Christ's emptying of Himself has placed Him in the centre of human worship. Therefore He is of Godhead. We worship Him as the Crucified—through the cross, not in spite of the cross. It has won Him, both by the heart's instinct and by God's will, the name *Lord*, which is above every name; and it is above in a sense which lifts Him out of the mere human category, and puts other men in the position, not of admirers, but worshippers. Christ's emptying of Himself is there-

fore treated as one of the powers of His Godhead, not a denial of it. He could not have emptied Himself but for His Godhead. It was His superhuman power, glory, and bliss that made Him able thus to limit His power. The cross is the overflow of exultant Godhead, its purple blossom. Its sorrow is the outlet for Divinest joy, the relief to exuberant Deity.

> I think this is the authentic sign and seal
> Of Godship, that it ever waxes glad,
> And more glad, until gladness blossoms, bursts
> Into a rage to suffer for mankind,
> And recommence at sorrow.

If we can neither do this nor comprehend it, it is because we are man and not God. We could only understand it by being able to do it. The Father alone knoweth the Son in such a matter, and understands how it was done. The act is a part and sign of Christ's Divine greatness. It is no negation of that greatness. It is a most Divine thing that the eternal Christ should consent to be weak, ignorant, short-lived. It should not come between us and the faith of His divinity at all, when we read true greatness, true Godhead, right. So we have the principle that limitation is a *power* of Godhead, not a curtailment of it. Among the infinite powers of the Omnipotent must be the power to limit Himself, and among His glories the grace to bend and die. Incarnation is not impossible to the Infinite; it is necessary. If He could not become incarnate His infinitude would be partial and limited. It would not be complete. It would be limited to all that is outside human nature. It would be limited by human nature in the sense of not being able to enter it, of being stopped at its gates. God would be curtailed to the extent of His creation. And that would be a more fatal limitation to His power than any He could suffer from being in it. He may be in without being locked in. But if He must be out it is because He is locked out, and effectually limited by a rival power. The power to limit Himself into man is an essential part of His infinite power. Without it He could not create. And creation is the beginning of Incarnation. It is God's self-concentration. Limitation or concentration is one of the surest signs of power. Vague power, aimless and wild, is not

divine. " 'Tis within limits that the master shows," says Goethe, in speaking of the great geniuses who have perfected their art in a form so small as the sonnet.

### II.—THE DIVINE PERSONALITY

(1) Let me risk some repetition on this matter. And first as to God's *personality*. It is said that He cannot be personal, because personality means limitation, and the Infinite and Almighty cannot be limited. If He could He would cease to be either, and so to be God. Well, so much as this may be granted. If there be any other power than God that can limit God, then there are two Gods, neither of them the Almighty; and so there is no God, as the word has been, and craves to be, understood. I pass over the very disputable point whether personality is in its nature finite because the individual personalities we meet are so. That would lead me too far. I would only ask, supposing we do find limitation in God, must it follow that it is due to some power outside God? Is the Infinite Will the one will that has no self-determination?

On the contrary, the limitation in God is due to God Himself. Self-limitation is one of the infinite powers of Godhead. If God were not personal, if He did not contain the mighty concentrative lines of personality, He would be less than God. He would be a waste, ineffectual force, without form and void. He could, indeed, hardly be force even, which must work in lines. He would be a dim essence, and empty substance, a gaseous abstraction without contents, without feature, interest, or life. He would be without order, for order is limitation. But surely order is the Divine presence in the world, not its absence. Law is His law, not another's law laid on Him. And personality is law and order in their highest terms. Limitation is no more undivine or incompatible with infinity in the one case than in the other. Divine law, indeed, when we express it in moral terms, what is it other than God's self-control?

Personality is thus essential to any ordered Godhead. It is an aspect of the self-limitation which must be among the powers of the Eternal, and of the self-command which must always be the condition of power in any moral being, finite or infinite. If God ceased to be personal, He would be parting with power, He

would lose hold on Himself, He would lose character, He would become foreign to all we mean by moral power, hope, or progress, and He would be so far weak, and not strong. What hope for the moral future if the cross, which is the extremity of Divine self-command, and so the condition of Divine conquest, were really found to be utterly alien to the nature of Godhead?

But, on the other hand, God is not imprisoned in His personality. That were a crude Deism, and only another form of weakness. His is a *free* personality. It is free in the sense that it has not the narrow range we associate with finite personalities. And it is free in the ethical sense. It is not stamped upon Him by a god beyond God—

> In truth the prison unto which we doom
> Ourselves no prison is.

The limits we freely lay upon ourselves, or accept freely, are part of our dignity. They are responsibility, and there is no dignity without that. The limited freedom of the married is a higher form than the unlimited freedom of celibates, who want to do as they like. The ordered freedom of a loving family is more free and worthy than the freedom of the lonely lodger with a latchkey. The limited freedom of a simple life is nobler than the unchartered liberty of luxury, free to indulge each whim. And so the infinite freedom and power of God is not a thing of immunities and abstractions, withdrawn from the world of nature and man. It is the power to live and move, with harmonious ease and completed being, in and through all the rich contents of nature, soul, and will, and finally to subdue them all to His own nature and purpose. Power, in the shape of genius or art, can never be released from ordinary moral conditions. Indeed, we rightly demand in such cases a deeper respect for the fundamental moralities of life. Still more must Omnipotence show itself at home within and not outside the limits of the world and life. It is not Omnipotence if it cannot empty itself of immunities and descend and be found in fashion as nature or man. If it resented this, and were incapable of it, it would be moral impotence, moral anarchy in particular, and consequently a spiritual pretender.

(2) When we speak of the *Incarnation* it is only another aspect of the same thing. The same infinite power as makes Godhead personal or creative, makes it incarnate. Godhead in emptying itself must have power to divest itself of certain attributes like omniscience, and to be found in fashion as a man, with human weakness, ignorance, and risk. There are many things which we know better than Christ did, and yet we rightly worship Him as the Incarnate Son of God. If the incarnation is not possible, then Theism is not.

### III.—THE INCARNATION AND ITS MORAL REALITY

I task you a little with this. Many are exercised about such things, which lame their faith. They are hampered by metaphysical difficulties which they have not enough metaphysics to keep in their proper place, and they make them a standard of faith. They come to Christ and propose to subject Him to certain rational tests and demands. Whereas Christ never concerned Himself about the rationality of His demands or tests; but He wanted religion, faith, surrender to Himself, obedience to God. Perhaps He would have gone respectfully by those who wanted to accept or reject Him by a standard of absolute ethics or absolute reason; and He would have discoursed to the poor in spirit and the really religious about the great matters of conscience, truth, and moral reality. They thought and spoke in His language, He in theirs. Ethical and metaphysical science are good and indispensable, but I doubt if Christ would have understood their speech, as they certainly often misunderstand His. He never spoke of Himself as the universal Reason. In the very gospel which is prefaced with the Eternity and Deity of the Logos, He never alludes to Himself in that way at all. But He did speak of Himself as the universal Judge and Lord. He claimed to be an authority for the *conscience*, not for the intellect. He does rule mind in the long run. But it is indirectly, from His seat in the conscience. It is because the conscience rules the intellect, and by the conscience reason stands or falls.

So I beg you particularly to observe that this bold phrase of Paul's, thrust into the interior of the Godhead, is not a metaphysical one. It is not rational. It is moral. He speaks of Christ

"emptying Himself", but he is not tracing a philosophic process. He has nothing to say about the passage of the Infinite into the finite, and the resumption of the finite by the Infinite again. There is not a suggestion of the vast unconscious becoming self-conscious in the finite, and so on. He was not brought up in the schools of Alexandria, nor was He the precursor of modern speculation. He was not in this passage running away from religious and practical ends, or indulging in an excursion into the metaphysics of deity. He was urging, with the mightiest motive He could think of the temper, so essentially Christian, of humility. I know our current, and especially our educated Christianity has forgotten the centrality of that virtue. Does it shine out in the great intellectual centres of this Christian country? Has it leavened and subdued the pagan selfhood and pride of the natural man, say, in the professional classes? Is the absence of it as fatal as it should be to Christian repute? It is not a Christian accomplishment or luxury, but a necessary element in Christian character. If it were not at the very centre of Christian character and ideal would Paul have gone to the very centre of the Godhead to find the great and final motive for it?

These Philippian Christians were but lately pagan. They had the moral uncouthness of the pagan amid their outward civilisation. You can get plenty of moral barbarism, mere militant self-assertion, yea, unspeakable grossness, amid much aesthetic and mental culture. Paul is urging on them the refinement so essential to Christian character, refinement which was not mere delicacy of sentiment, but the moral quality of true humility. He knows it is a hard thing, but he knows it is central. So he brings to bear the sublimest as well as the most moving of motives. He places before the Philippian Christians the tender, mighty, and solemn renunciations which were in the very bosom of Godhead itself. He colours with the crimson of sacrifice the pale centres of Deity; and, led by the Holy Ghost, he declares God to be "human at the red-ripe of His heart."* Mark the point. He does not philosophize about the divine *essence*. He deals with a living Godhead. He shows us the *motive* of the divine *action*. He does not carry us into the substance of Deity by meta-

* Browning: *The Ring and the Book*, Bk. I (altered).

physics, but into the heart and conscience, the act and motive, of God by faith. He says Christ in the Godhead emptied Himself. And though we cannot go far in the interpretation of such a vast suggestion, we can take care that it is the right kind of interpretation we put on it. And we find the key to the right kind of interpretation in the other word, "humbled Himself, and became obedient."

There are two phrases, "He emptied Himself," and "He humbled Himself." They do not mean the same. The first refers to something that took place in the bosom of Godhead before Jesus was born, before the foundation of the world; the second refers to the earthly human life of Jesus, its spirit, principle, and visible aspect. And it is by the second that Paul mounts up to the first. It is the heavenly that *accounts* for the earthly, that is true; but it is the earthly that *brings home* to us the heavenly no less. The humility of Christ's life and death was a palpable thing, intelligible to people who had any due moral perception. It fascinated them. It grew upon them. It opened out and deepened inward. It was a great and eloquent moral fact, a great and significant spiritual word. And it carried Paul beyond the world, beyond humanity, to what was at the root of it, what went on in the unseen Godhead before the foundation of the world. And it made him feel that whatever else was done there, in the self-emptying of Godhead, it was in its nature a great *moral* act; a great moral renunciation, an act of the same *kind* as that life-long humiliation in which the will of Christ achieved depth after depth of free devotion up to a death of shame. The great eternal act of Christ in heaven and Godhead, before and beyond history, was of a like *nature* to the long act of will by which He went down to death in His human history. It was an act of heart and will, of free resolve, of self-limitation, self-contraction as it were, self-divesting, self-humiliation, self-subordination. We are prone to think of humility as a feature of those who have very little will of their own, and who always take the path of least resistance. No wonder, then, that we make so little of humility. But Paul thinks of it as the supreme act and expression of the supreme will under human conditions, the greatest thing the greatest will could do. He thinks of it, not as a sentiment, not as a sense of weakness, not

as an occasional mood, but as the great ethical act, which forms the real connection, common term, and the *reconciliation* between God and man.

### IV.—THE INCARNATION AS THE MIRACLE OF GRACE IS NOT IN THE BIRTH, BUT IN THE DEATH OF CHRIST.

The reconciliation between God and man lay in that great spiritual *act* of Christ's humiliation, an act which drew upon His whole person and gave effect to it. Looking forward, the moral effect of that act on us is our central Christian virtue of humility.

> For that which men think weakness within strength,
> But angels know for strength and stronger yet—
> What were it else but the first things made new,
> But repetition of the miracle,
> The Divine instance of self-sacrifice
> That never ends and aye begins for man?

And, looking backwards, it is the key to that self-emptying in eternity which is the principle of the Incarnation. This puts a great and neglected truth which I am at some pains to urge. Paul does not take the Incarnation as a special mode of two co-existing natures, human and divine, and make it the means of explaining the humiliation, the cross. That is the way of the philosophic theologian, who illuminates the Word by starting, not from Christ, but from rational truths and principles. But Paul starts with Christ, with His actual historic humiliation. From that footing he is caught into reaches beyond time and the world. He discovers that the key to the nature of the Incarnation is to be found in the humiliation. The two acts are really one and the same act as seen from time and from eternity. Their nature is one. If the humiliation was a great act of will and obedience, then the Incarnation is the same, rather than an adjustment of two natures in one person. If the humiliation was moral in its central feature, then the central feature of the Incarnation was not metaphysical but moral also. It also was an act of will, of obedience, of self-subordination in the sublimest terms. Now, granting all Christ's miracles, yet there was nothing in that sense miraculous about the long act of *humiliation* in which Christ's whole life went down

to death. However miracle may have been associated with it, miracle was not of its essence. It was moral, and not miraculous, in its grandeur. It was moving rather than striking. He refused the miraculous aid of legions of angels in the crisis of His work. Redemption was a *spiritual* conflict and victory in a great *moral* war. The humiliation was as little miraculous as metaphysical. It was one of us that was labouring, fighting, trusting, dying, conquering; but it was Godhead as one of us. And we must apply the same principle, if we follow Paul, to the *Incarnation*. It is in redemption that we find the nature of the Incarnation. It was not any feature of miracle that made its essence, its value, its power. It was the moral element of self-emptying. It was the sublime act of Christ's will and God's will combined, of Son and Father ever one. The central impulse, quality, and virtue of the Incarnation was not in any process undergone by Divine substance, or any intricate relation set up between two natures, or any circumstance attending the mode by which Jesus was born into the world. You may hold a variety of views on those heads and yet miss the power of His Incarnation in them all. The centre of the Incarnation is where Christ placed the focus of His work—not at the beginning of His life, but at its end; not in the manger, but in the cross. The key to the Incarnation is not in the cradle, but in the cross. The light on Bethlehem falls from Calvary. The virtue lies in some act done by Christ; and He Himself did no act in His birth, but in His death He did *the* act of the universe. The soul of the Incarnation does not lie in His being born of a pure virgin; but it lies in the death of His pure soul and the perfect obedience of His will as a propitiation for the sins of the world. God was in Christ as reconciler, not as prodigy. The key to the Incarnation lies, not in the miracle performed on His mother, but in the act of redemption performed by Himself. Christ's great work on our behalf was not in assuming our nature at birth, but in what He did with the nature we call assumed. Men were not redeemed by Christ being *born* as He was, but by His *dying* as He did. It is that which establishes His power over us sinners. It is that which makes His real value to our souls, because it is there that He atones, expiates, reconciles. It is that which gives chief value to His entrance in the world—

not that He was miraculously born, but that He was born to die and redeem. The saving humiliation was not that of the manger but of the cross. It was a humiliation not inflicted or imposed, but achieved. And the self-emptying behind all was one to be explained, not by anything happening *to* Him in His humble birth, but by what happened *through* Him in His humiliating death. If He had not been born in that way, and yet had died as He did, He would still have been our reconciliation with God, our Redeemer from the curse, and our Saviour from the sin of the soul and of the race.

The power of His Incarnation has become so weak among men, for one reason, because its explanation has been sought at the wrong end of His life. The wonder has been transferred from Good Friday to Christmas, from the festival of the second birth to the festival of the first, from redemption to nativity, from the fellowship of His death to the sentiment of His babyhood. And so we hear sometimes that Christianity is a religion for women and children, and for men in the moods when they are less men and more mild.

### V.—THE SON'S SUBORDINATION AND ITS PRACTICAL BEARINGS

I want to press the lesson home in this way, this moral way, this practical way. We are not all thinkers, but we are all moralists in some way. We have sins to be forgiven, and we have duties to be done. And duties are determined for us by those moral relations from which not one is exempt. How can we know our duty except we know our moral relations? How can we know our duty to God without our relation to Him?

Christ emptied Himself, we are told. In doing so He did on a higher and previous plane what He did also in the humiliation of His historic life. And there is a paraphrase of the words given for our help. The phrases run in balanced pairs in this difficult passage. And the counter phrase to "emptied Himself" is "He counted not equality with God a *thing to be snapped at.*" He was of God-head, "in the form of God," within the pale of Godhead, but in Paul's thought He did not possess equality with God, with God the Father. What He emptied Himself of was, not the equality, but the form, the glory, the immunity of Godhead. He put

that off, and put on the contrasted form and apparent dignity of a servant. Of course the Son must be subordinate to the Father, though both are in the same Divine form or family. And the true son is one who realises that subordination. He did not regard equality as a prize, something to be snatched at. Lucifer, according to the story, the first of all the angels, did so regard it. He exalted himself above all that was called God, and fell from heaven's household and glory. Adam, in the other story, also regarded this equality as an object of burning ambition. "Eat, and ye shall be as gods," he was told, and he ate, and his eyes were opened, but his God was hid. Christ as Son had no such passion. He did not aspire to equality of power or knowledge, but to obedience. And so He kept and enhanced that glory which He had with the Father before the world was.

Notice, then, I have the practical point still in view. He was of Godhead, but He sought no equality with God. The glory of Godhead He had, but it was the Godlike glory of subordination. There is place and order in the Godhead, and he kept it. Subordination *is* godlike. He was in the category of God, but He did not claim the immunities of God. The Son would not oust the Father. In a word, *He was not inferior to God, but He was subordinate. Subordination is not inferiority.*

Oh, if you could but learn that in this your day, how many griefs, heart-burnings, rebuffs, failures, and soul bitterness it would save you and your posterity!

Subordination is *not* inferiority, and it *is* godlike. The principle is imbedded in the very cohesion of the Eternal Trinity, and it is inseparable from the unity, fraternity, and true equality of men. It is not a mark of inferiority to be subordinate, to have an authority, to obey. It is Divine. To suffer no lord or master—that is Satanic; to discard all control but superior force is the demonic form of sin, which soon passes into the brutal. To have no loyalty is to have no dignity, and in the end no manhood.

You hear wild talk among youths that they are free rational beings, and are not going to be a whit more subordinate than they can help, to father, tutor, master, or faith of any kind. The end of which is a hard, coarse individualism, a selfishness gradually growing arrogant (if it be not that to begin with), the rup-

ture of family life, filial faith, homely duty, and kindly rule, and the dissolution of all the fine loyalties of the soul for which great men worthily die.

And you hear wild talk in the like vein among women, who start the regeneration of their sex by declaring subordination to be unwomanly, a relic of slavery, a badge of inferiority; as if insubordination were any more lovely in woman than in man, and as if women specially could afford to discard loveliness. I am not going here into special applications, or even into necessary qualifications. I am only laying down the Christian principle, rooted in the very nature of God, and essential to the manhood and womanhood He has made. Without the spirit of subordination there is no true godlikeness, no nobleness of manhood, no charm of womanhood. And the true inferiority is insubordination, and the spirit which will have no authority and resents all control.

A very able yet timid writer (I mean A. J. Balfour) said in a philosophic work, "If we would find the quality in which we most notably excel the brute creation, we should look for it, not so much in our faculty of convincing and being convinced by the exercise of reasoning, as in our capacity for influencing and being influenced through the action of Authority." With which I heartily agree, so long as by authority is meant what Paul means here, the moral authority of character, of a living personality, of the living law and the living Lord, whose name of Lord, because of His dying, is above all lordship, and whose humiliation is the Eternal Authority, as His cross is the final judge of all things and all men.

### VI.—THE GOD OF THE FUTURE THE GIVING GOD

I will close on the keynote, "He emptied Himself". The one thing which it is the business of Revelation to let us know about the depths of eternal Godhead is this, that its Divinest power is the power to resign, to sacrifice, to descend, to obey, to save. The key to the prehistoric Godhead is the historic Jesus, and His historic obedience, even to the historic cross. And I could almost think that the deepest error which has blinded and lamed Christianity in the world, the root of every other perversion and

failure, is indicated here. It is in having conceived of God as a Being whose first and Divinest work was to *receive* sacrifice instead of offering it—one who demanded sacrifices He had never made. Deep into the fabric of Christian thought and habit has struck this pagan strain, that it is God's one royal work to accept sacrifice, and man's one saving duty to offer it. The Christian note is quite other. In the face of all the paganisms, ancient and modern, civil or ecclesiastical, it is bold and original in the extreme. It not only carries into Godhead the power of sacrifice, but it declares this priestliness to be the very saving power of God, the root of all that is glorious in everlasting glory, or kingly in the King of kings. "God so loved that He *gave*." The Divine King is King because He is Priest. That is the marrow of the Christian revelation, the originality of the Christian vision, the sublimity and finality of the Christian faith. And the Church will not gain the power of which the Spirit has made her dream till she has become permeated with this truth in its fulness. It is not enough that it be held by an enlightened student, saint, or community here and there. It is only when the soul of that truth has fused and recast the whole Church of every land that its revolutionary power upon the creed and practice of Christendom will appear. And society will then be dominated, not by spirits whose best life has been spent in the acquisition of things for the lack of which men and brethren round them are dying, but by that unrequited elect, that great unpaid, whose life is a long surrender and whose fate is to be long misunderstood; who do not clamour for their deserts, because the wages of their sin would be death, and also because their faith is that it is a godlier thing to give than to receive; but they empty themselves to make room in themselves and the world for the fulness and glory of God in the cross of Christ the Lord.

# THE TASTE OF DEATH AND THE LIFE OF GRACE

# THE TASTE OF DEATH AND THE LIFE OF GRACE

"That he by the grace of God should taste death for every man."—Hebrews ii. 9.

In this great verse I would enforce these three points:

I. He tasted death.

II. It was a universal death.

III. It was a grace and gift of God to Him.

I. Jesus Christ not only died, but He tasted death as incredible bitterness and penury of soul. I would dwell on the psychology even more than on the theology of it.

II. He did so because He died for every man. He experienced in a Divine life the universal death.

III. Yet this desertion and agony of death was a gift and grace of God, not only to us, but to Him. And He knew it was so. And that faith was His victory and our redemption.

## I.—THE TASTE OF DEATH

Christ not only died, but He tasted death. He gauged its bitterness, meanness, and dismal woe.

### 1. THE TASTE OF DEATH TO-DAY

The Englishman is an optimist. He has little sympathy with the pessimistic systems which lay such hold of other lands. He puts them down to disordered digestion; he is like an ancient haruspice; he is too much influenced by the viscera, and too ready to read events in the state of the liver. His optimism is based quite as much upon ignorance as upon faith; he succeeds, so far as success is attainable by underrating what he has to contend

with. In the spiritual region this is especially so. He preserves his piety rather by going on as if there were no spiritual foes, than by recognising and defeating them. He lacks the spiritual imagination; his faith, therefore, is not very relevant in its form to the spiritual situation of the hour. He does not grasp the world-problem; he does not master it with the world-soul. He may call his Christianity Catholic, but it is not really ecumenical. It meets *his* needs rather than those of the race. It reflects a temporary situation rather than the eternal problem of the soul. It handles some form of death or phase of life, rather than the race's life or the race's doom. He does not readily apprehend the human problem or make the soul's last stand. And, therefore, he does not draw upon the last resources of his creed, or elicit the deepest powers of his Church, his Saviour, or his God. We cannot realize the riches of Christ till we have well-sounded the need of Him.

If we try to look at the matter with larger and other eyes than our own, we may come to perceive that in the death and misery which we are too healthy to dwell on, there are spiritual opportunities far richer than the mere chance of wiping them out or alleviating them. And a true diagnosis of the time may show that the modern difficulty is not death so much as pain. Such is the case in other lands of Europe if not in our own. I speak more of the old civilization than of the New World. Life grows more and more severe. Pain becomes more inward—more in the nature of care, fear, or despair. It is, therefore, more intractable and taxing. Zymotic diseases abate, and nervous increase. Grief and strain advance along with physical security and comfort. Civilization only internalizes the trouble. We have fewer wounds, but more weariness. We are better cared for, but we have more care. There is less agony, perhaps, but, perhaps also, more misery; less that we see, more that we divine.

Besides, we grow more sensitive. The nervous organisation grows more susceptible. Or if our nerves feel no more our sympathies do. The old pain is more felt, more impatiently borne. For this the gospel itself is in some measure responsible. We very properly hear much of the gospel as amelioration; but we ought to hear more of it as aggravation. It makes men worse on the

way to make them better. At least, it carries home and brings out the evil that is in them. Its law enters that sin may be shown to be sin, and the soul be shut up unto mercy by being cornered into despair. And it is another phase of the same action in the gospel when its ideals turn our achievements to dust, and put us out of all conceit with our actual state. Its promises make us more impatient of the slow payment we receive, and its hopes make us resent more keenly the small instalments that arrive. The gospel has fixed in the race, even of its deniers, a deeper conviction of destined bliss, and, therefore, pain is felt to be more of an intrusion. It is more of an intrusion into the ideal order of things. More people than ever before feel their right to happiness and resent its destruction. There is more anger at pain, and at the order of things including it. The mind of Europe is a magnified Job. We are rent asunder by a progressive culture and an arrested ethic, by an imagination that grows faster than the practical conditions of realizing it. Reality seems several lives beyond intuition. We dream a dream of good, but the Agnostics will not let us identify it with the ultimate reality of God. And for want of God our practical progress limps and halts far in the wake of our great surmise. And of the moral energy that we do have so much is engrossed with healing or preventing pain, that it is withdrawn from the noble enduring of it, from the conversion and sanctification of wounds incurable.

Many would welcome euthanasia as release from fruitless, hopeless suffering. An increasing number, especially abroad, end by suicide a life of moral confusion; and many more would do so if they had the courage, or if they could get rid of the hereditary arrest. Death is less regarded with supernatural awe, and men quail more at the earthly misery before or after, at the poverty and helplessness it may entail on those who are left.

From thinking more of pain than of death people are passing on to think of death itself as a form of pain rather than as a supernatural mystery or a spiritual experience. It comes not so much as a ghost, but as a torturer. Men used to pray for delivery from sudden death; now they pray for delivery by it—for sudden death, to cheat the pain which they dread more.

Death affects the person of the man less and his sense more.

He does not think of it in relation to what he is, but to what he feels. And he feels it as the dissolution of all personal relations, sympathies, and helps. Faith views it as the deepening of the personality by a new intimacy of personal relation to God in Christ, but it is not so that it is felt by this age. It is an ache rather than an experience. We are passive in it and not active. It is the loss of all we have been gaining, and not the gain of all we have been hoping. It scatters our wrath, wilts our affection, and turns the love we clung to into wretched regrets. We do not count on a future for ourselves, and when we think of the future of our dear ones we are prone to wish we had not had a past. Death ceases to be a personal act and becomes a mere inevitable fact, and it sinks to the commonness of all mere facts when severed from acts. In a word, we just die with the rest instead of dying with Christ.

So we taste death more than our fathers did. It rankles more. It lingers on the palate. It is taken by many with the daily food. It is a present misery rather than an imaginative fear. It is a tale of mud flats and wan struggles rather than anything with the dignity of the unseen and the majesty of spiritual fear. Death becomes a natural enemy more than a supernatural mystery, a moral irritant rather than a spectral dread. It becomes a moral problem where it used to be a moral penalty. It does not so much terrify as a ghost, but intrudes like a Satan to accuse the goodness of God and impugn the reality of His moral order. It does not so much bring another world near as it increases the pain and terror of this. Men do not pine to be immortal, but to escape pain and avert it from those they love.

What is the *taste* of death?

That is something horrible—below the power of any art to convey. Art may try expression by sight or sound. But taste! No art speaks to the sense of taste. So the horror of the deathliest death cannot be mitigated or dignified by the treatment of art. Death in its lees is bitter and ashy. It is nauseous and sordid when we really taste its last touch on life. The more we live and the greater our vitality the more acrid and squalid is that subtle, stealthy death which thwarts, poisons, corrodes and erases life. It is grey, leprous, and slow.

The worst and worldliest pain of death is something which cannot be medicined by the resources of art.

> To know the change and feel it,
> With none at hand to heal it,
> Nor numbéd sense to steal it,
> Was never told in rhyme.

For death, if thorough, is not sheer oblivion and Nirvana, but it does extinguish those ennobling resources and imaginations by which our higher senses conquer sense. And so we take the pain of a lower and unimaginative sense, like taste, to express the utter deathliness of death. If we are to *feel* death, realise the deadliness of it, and yet master it, it must be by *Faith*, for we are beyond the help of imagination. Imagination, thank God, may carry us through death if it supply visions of heaven and glory vivid enough to submerge its most hideous fears. But it is only faith in God that can master it in its ultimate form, its most desolate, squalid, benumbing and panic form, death in a moral waste, in spiritual solitude, impotence and failure, death with just enough feeling left to feel itself dead.

### 2. THE TASTE OF DEATH FOR CHRIST

Now, Christ tasted death (I press this from the fact, not from my text, which does not intend to emphasize the word as I do); He did not simply die like most. The whole efficacy of His death lay in that. He experienced the worst of it, touched the bottom of it, nay, went under that. He felt the horror, the sordid horror of it, the Godforsakenness of it, the earthiness, the deadness of it. No poetry of it helped him. He did not flush to anticipate the scene. There was no enthusiasm of battle, no sympathy of comrades, no shouting for a cause. There was no ideal beauty or power in it at the worst moment. It was the pain symbolized by one of the lower senses, such as taste; a pain which could borrow no relief from imaginative aspects of the case. It was death with a past of failure, a lonely present, and a dark future. It was a dreary hell, a dismal swamp, an icy grave. It was like the death of an explorer, with broken nerve and evil memories, in the Arctic fog. If Christ sounded and tasted death to the uttermost,

He conquered by principle a death like that. He knew "despair", as Calvin says of the cry on the cross; He knew for a space the modern malady of despair. And it makes nothing against this that it was a broken-hearted and resigned despair, and not a furious. Despair on the heroic scale is not furious. It certainly is not so in the modern mind. The worst despair is that which has sapped energy, so much that there is no vigour for fury. It has worn down the soul so that it cannot rage. It may be bitter, but it is not frantic. It may even settle down, as in Matthew Arnold, into a wistful regret, whose foot falls soft upon the carpets of Anglican culture, and whose language is tuned to the Dorian mode of flutes and soft recorders. The despair of our day is not frantic, but it may be all the more desperate. It may be the despair of souls too underfed for vigorous hopelessness, and too pruned and trimmed for flat denial. There was much more pathos than frenzy in the Godforsakenness of it; and there was so much the more contact with the quiet hopelessness that blights the spiritual outlook of an overbusy age.

There is no sign that Christ was sustained in the crisis of that black hour by thoughts or visions of the long future. "Instead of the joy set before Him, He endured the cross." He was not supported by foreseeing what coming blessing His death or agony would bring. That would have been an imaginative glory in whose wealth He might well have forgotten the horror of the hour. And, on the other hand, the pain of death was not for Him a dread or prevision of the future fires of hell. Heaven did not mitigate death, and hell did not sharpen it. The pain and horror were, as in our modern case, in death itself. If He was the death of death, it was because He tasted the death in death, and visited the caverns of horror that underlie the soul, and are seldom entered even by the dying man. He tasted the death of the universal soul—death eternal. It was the horror of the holy when He "became sin". And this suggests another point where His death touches our modern attitude to it. We feel the pain and disappointment of death as impugning the moral goodness of God. To us pain and death seem a moral outrage, a violent injustice done to the good. And it was moral outrage on the holy that gave the sting and the mean misery of death for Him. Only

a great difference remains. The taste of death makes us think that it is a moral outrage *on* us—a tyranny; whereas He tasted it as the fruit of a moral outrage *by* us—a treason. And how prompt we are to accept Christ as a sympathizer with our oppressions, and how slow to take Him as the accuser of our sins!

### THE MORAL OR SECOND DEATH

He tasted death as it can only be tasted by the moral delicacy of the High and Holy One, who feels Himself in the atmosphere of base, revolting sin, of moral atheism, ashiness, mustiness, torpor, dust. He bruised the serpent—a thing of the slime. The last sin He met was ignoble, devoid of that heroic rebellion which robs some evil of its grossness and gives a Redeemer at least a worthy foe. A satyr may conquer at last the soul that once withstood a Satan. The enemy that Christ met in death had nothing of greatness, perhaps, to nerve him and aid his valour. I am speaking only of the last form of evil that He faced. His conflict with evil did not begin with the passion week. At the outset, in the temptation, and during His strenuous ministry, Christ did feel that He was coping with the great Satan, a world-power, wickedness in high places. But him He vanquished, and saw him fall like lightning from heaven. It was a Satan falling even from his first fall—deformed by it, earthy and debased, that He met last. At the end there is no sign of that first grand antagonism; evil assails Him in a deadlier, more inveterate, even subtler form—yea, a form more inaccessible to Him because meaner, less Satanic, less Miltonic, more modern and Mephistophelian. There is nothing in moral art more fine and true than the debasement which in "Paradise Lost" passes upon the sublime Satan after his rout, changing him, as he persists in his Satanism, from his noble form to the serpent shape, and turning his eloquence to a hiss. Base sin may be hard to destroy just in proportion as it is easy to resist. The noble heart cannot stoop to its plane. It is hard to slay what it is hard to meet. There is a sense in which it is hardest to cope with that which cometh and findeth nothing in you. There are evils to be destroyed for the world, and they are the hardest if they offer no temptation to ourselves. They cost us nothing to resist when they come to us, but it is all the more

loathsome for us to go to them and destroy them. The trials that come are light beside those we go to. Therefore we pray, "lead us not into temptation", rather lead temptation up to us. The more we abhor them the more sickening it is to exterminate them, to seek their lair, breathe their air, kill them in their nest. There is sin which a Universal Redeemer cannot leave unslain, which yet does not so much break the sword of the Spirit as corrode it, like Grendel's blood, in Beowulf. It uses the dagger instead of the sword, so to say. It poisons the wells, but does not take the field. It poisons the murky air, obscures the issue, and unnerves the arm. It is mephitic, the prince of the power of the air. It does not encounter, it envelopes. Its hideousness, like the sea monster, couches in the blinding cloud it makes. Satan himself, if he be still the arch-foe, is a sorry Satan, a demoralized, vulgarised Satan, a Satan of the latter days, whether Christ's or ours, the Satan of the sneer and the everlasting No. We might speculate how far Judas gave Christ the final type of the last enemy to be destroyed. With us, at least, this is the hardest kind of foe. The deadliest Satan is an ignoble Satan. It is the ignoble adversary, the base conflict, that steals most of the warrior's strength. The loathing of filth may be so great, says Nietzsche, that it prevents us from washing, *i.e.*, from justifying ourselves. It is a universe of petty evil, an infinity of moral meanness, that wears down his faith and puts him to the sorest test. It is the mean, petty fighter that the true protagonists most dread, the enemy too low for their sword, who lurks in the long grass with a nimble knife, with cunning, silence, innuendo and contempt, who buys your recruits with a bribe, meets your arguments by imputing motives, and damns your cause by smirching your character. The king of terrors is the old serpent, the spirit of the slime, the great dragon, the wrinkled elder of the snakes. And within ourselves the worst enemy, a Saviour's despair, is that troop of base, cunning, almost impish, often reptile, temptations which make the conflict so mean that we have no stimulus to our moral best, nor vigilance enough to cope with the slow, sleepless microbic perdition. So general and so fatal is this form of evil today that a great living genius* has enthroned in the moral world

* Thomas Hardy.

of his art a power whose vast, but impish, providence is well served by the base passions and tendencies that thwart in all his characters the good and pure.

All sin runs out at last to mean sin. And it is the mean sinners that are the hardest to save, the last tax on a Redeemer, perhaps hopeless, intractable, in the end, even to his death. Their element is death at its deadliest. They haunt a miry suburb in the soul's black country, of mean houses, half built and then deserted, "bog, clay and rubble, sand and stark black death". To encounter that, to enter such benumbing, belittling, inert, penurious air is to taste the death in death. It is the very atmosphere of suicide. It is the region of moral and spiritual nausea.

Now, this is faith's opportunity. There is no living through that death but by faith, as force flags and vision fails. It is a Protestant salvation—by faith alone. Faith's last victory is not over a majestic foe, but over a shifty, sordid, stifling, paralyzing foe. That is the last death to be destroyed in death. Your heroism is not in encountering the great temptations with the elation of strength but in meeting the mean, incessant, wearing temptations through moral habit bred from past elations; when you have to drag yourself to the conflict, benumbed in vitality, and alive only in trained faith to the grace and goodness of a darkling God.

## II.—DEATH FOR THE MILLION

It was thus He tasted the death of the million, death "for every man", the death which is the death of all of us. He tasted the average man's death, not the hero's alone, the death of the little man, the failure and collapse of the man in a mean way of moral business, the cave-dwellers of the conscience. He tasted that in our moral death which is most universal, the commonness of it, the sorriness of it, what gives it access to all doors, and entrance at the very cracks and chinks in the rear of our nature. He tasted death from a generation of vipers. It was death by sickly candle-light in a little house in a back street among miles of them. It was death made cheap, death for the million.

### I. A WORLD OF DEATH

"For every man!" universal death. I have spoken of its meanness. I speak now of the universality of its meanness. And I will risk the charge of ambition by dwelling on the *vastness* of that death and of its results. The tone of much of our culture is robbing us of our sense of the *greatness* of Christ and His gospel. There is an affectation of subduedness and a modesty of mere good form, which clips the wings of faith lest preaching should pass beyond good talk or piety quit the region of sisterly affection.

How should a man feel who was alive, alone, in a world of the dead? It is beyond imagination desolate. To be alone on the earth with none but the dead, go where you might! It would be dreary and appalling enough for most men to be frozen up with one or two companions only in the Arctic Circle. To be there alone in a world of monotonous thick-ribbed ice, in the darkness of a long night, in driving snowstorms—what could be more desolate and awful? One thing, perhaps; to know, while there, that you were the only living soul on the earth, that if you returned to warmer suns you would find everyone dead, that the whole earth was one vast cemetery in which you were the only man alive. That would be what Shelley calls "desolation deified". Your mind could not bear this strain; you would go mad in the awful dreariness of such death. The taste of it would kill you physically. Is this imagery more awful or less awful than what Christ felt? Was Christ's agony below imagination or above it, beyond it? too trifling or too solemn for it? His solitude was that of *the Life* amidst the dead world. The more He was the life the more power He had to feel death. Poverty means more to a man used to plenty. For Him the soul of man was dead—in principle at least. I do not say the death was *total* as yet; there was still greatness and goodness among men, even among some who failed to see His. But it was *universal*; all were infected by it. There were none wholly great. And all were moving to death, only give the generations time. Every soul was dead compared with Him. It was a world of the dead so far as His life and purpose were concerned. Of the people there were none with Him.

Morally, spiritually, He was the only soul truly alive. He had no man like-minded to care for their state. The light shone in the darkness and the darkness comprehended it not. He came unto His own and His own received Him not. He was Life Eternal, and all men refused Him. They were therefore dead. As a living man would be to a world of dead or dying men, so was Christ to the world of living men. With all the energy and culture of the then world, it was yet dead in trespasses and sins, and the more dead that it did not know it. Christ stood alone, amid all the sunshine indeed that there is now, but amid universal moral death. To an eye like His this must be more awful than physical death. And the spectacle of the dead spiritual world around Him must be more awful than our imagination of any lonely survivor on the graveyard of the earth. That survivor would taste the bitterness of death as he could not if there were but one other living soul beside him. *We* can imagine, but he would *realise*. We can *imagine* a world of the dead, and see a certain grandeur in the solitary figure surviving in such a vast and ghastly desert. But there is a certain grandeur in such an imagination: and our shudder is not the actual chill of death, but an æsthetic effect of something which is called before our mind's eye, yet outside of us and our reality. We are there with our poetry; and the survivor is not absolutely alone. But with Christ is was not imagination. He did not *view* a pictorial world of the dead. He was the life of men, and so He *realized* it. He died that death. It was not in imagination that He passed through such an experience. What He felt was not an æsthetic chill, nor a mere spectator's fear. He *realized* this moral death. It was less than actual sin in Him, but more than sympathy. He tasted it as really universal. This death of the million He died for the million. As it was *universal*, *He* was involved in it—involved, though not diseased, not captured. His life as Man was a real life, and He was bound to feel the last reality of man's deadness. And He alone *could* feel it. *They* were too dead in sin. Alone He fulfilled the condition of feeling a moral death utterly universal, and therefore dreary, cold, loathsome, to such a soul as His. He so went down with His more than sympathy into the reality of our moral death that He was unsustained by any sense of the grandeur and sublimity of the situation.

Æsthetic sympathy is but a parable of the moral sympathy of Christ. If He was to *taste* human death He must forgo that imaginative vision of it in which its very universality seems grand. He did not simply behold death as being in every man; He tasted death for every man. He lived, died, that death. Universality when beheld with the eye of genius has a grandeur. But to *enter* this universal was to lose the sense of its universality in its deadness. It was to be caught in the chill of its mortality. He experienced the eclipse which made imaginative vision as impossible as men have felt it to be in extreme stages of exhaustion and depression. He felt the universal blight. He "poured out His soul unto death". What a phrase! As if the limpid water which transfigured every pebble ran off and left but the muddy bed and débris of death. He parted with what men call "soul", or fine insight, and took the state of the commonest, dreariest man or woman who has been robbed of everything—fortune, faculty, and feeling—except faith.

Dying for every man means that He shared in soul (though not in conscience) a universal moral death. And to enter *universal* death is to *taste* its reality and become its prey, to shudder and *dwindle* in a sense, to feel the fog and sick poison of that dismal world on the scale of His own great soul, to feel on Him the curse of that sin which His soul loathed, which embraced Him, but found in Him no consent. The death *for* all men was a death *from* all men. And He survived this world of death, and He conquered for every man by nothing imaginative, but by the quenchless power and vitality of the one thing left Him—of His faith in God. The taste of universal death means all the world-pessimism which either ends downwards in universal suicide, or, mounting by faith, obtains universal Redemption. If Christ had not gained that victory human history would simply have evolved universal destruction. It was the final, absolute, universal dilemma of the human soul—if you will think to the bottom of things.

### 2. OUR FATAL AVOIDANCE OF DEATH

I anticipate the complaint that I linger too long and insist too much upon the dull, mean misery of soul involved in the taste of universal death. I may be told that it is not well to dwell on

such terror—that the saving work is done, and we are now in the realm of the Holy Ghost and the joy of salvation. May I say, in reply, first this, that we could not possibly dwell there in the way of habitual residence. We may dwell on it without dwelling in it. Next, that Christ Himself only tasted this death. He did not pass His life, or any large portion of it, in it. He certainly did realize its awful quality. He did not merely contemplate or imagine it. But as to quantity, or extent, it did not cover His life. He descended into this hell, but He did not dwell there. It was but a taste, though it was a taste and not a sip.

But let me say this also, that I think by our avoidance of such subjects we are losing in spiritual sensibility, spiritual experience, and so in spiritual power. I am sure that the attention so freely given by the Church to-day to grace in the Greek sense, to the beauty of Christ, the beauty of the Cross, the beauty of holiness, has done something to impair real spiritual feeling, to produce, not levity, but religious mediocrity and inadequacy. It is too æsthetic in its nature. It does not search, harrow, and elicit the soul enough. It does not plough deep enough for the true crop of the Cross and the fruits of the Spirit. Not to realize hell is not to prize the Cross. Am I right in thinking that specific and profound Christian experience is growing rarer even where Christian sensibility is by no means dull? Are we parting with soul in the race for souls? We do seem too much accustomed to-day to translate the love of Christ into the terms of human affection, and the Cross of Christ into the terms of human surrender, or into the law of philosophic reconciliation. We treat all love as God's love by a certain juggle with the word divine. We seek the perfection of love in sacrifice instead of in redemption, in sacrifice for the beloved's good instead of sacrifice for the rebel's salvation. We identify renouncing love with redeeming love. We idealize reciprocal love, and call it divine, instead of reading God's revelation of His love as dying for the ungodly. This is love original and absolute. Hereby know we love at its source. If we translate let us translate from that. Let us translate from the original, and not back from a translation. Let us work downward from Love's own account of itself in Christ. Let us begin at the beginning, or, however we translate, at least let us interpret man by God, love

by grace. The real revelation is not in the cradle, but in the Cross; not in the home, but in the Church. We should interpret our human affection by the love of God who first loved us, our life's afflictions by the sufferings of Christ, and the eternal process by His awful conflict. It would do more for our spiritual sensibility itself. Have not the tenderest men you knew, the men of real moral tenderness, been sterner than most of the merely gentle and kind? It would certainly do more for our Christian strength and character. With a great price we obtained our freedom. I know it is useless and mischievous to paint horrors, to dwell on suffering as suffering, just as it is morally worthless to make sacrifices merely for the sake of sacrifice. But it is quite necessary that we should be recalled time after time to a true sense of the sufferings of Christ, and detained upon the nature of His death.

And by a true sense I mean a sense germane to the real spiritual situation of our age, and to its mental dialect, a sense relevant to its moral tone, and to its idea of death, not in our own circle or communion or country, but in Europe, say. There was a time when it was more congenial to the condition of society to dwell much on the physical sufferings of Christ. It is the case still in the Romance races, and in Catholic lands. It was the habit of that middle age when it was a rude and full-blooded Europe, of incessant bloodshed and coarseness and cruelty. And the custom survived even into Protestant times. Now we must always worship and preach the precious blood of Christ. But there is a way of speaking about the blood of Christ and dwelling on it which is not only distasteful but, what is worse, is meaningless to our time. Few of us see bloodshed, as the Jews did in sacrifices, and the Middle Ages in war. If the pavement is stained by an accident, it is the business of society to cleanse it from sight at once. The language of blood does not come home to us as it did once. But the horror of death does, though it is in other forms, in other terms. I do not think the old preachers overdid the dark and awful side of the death of Christ. I do not think it is overdone in the attention of the Churches who keep a rigid Lent and a solemn Good Friday. I only say they are apt to seek the horror and the solemnity in the wrong place. They pursue it on its physical side, and the world has moved away from physical

terror to psychical. It is the moral horror of death that comes home to us to-day. It is not writhing agony, for we have hospitals and anæsthetics; but it is the mute, lonely, soulless misery of a faithless, hopeless, loveless round of drudgery, failure, and lacerated life. It is not the grief of broken limbs in a struggle with executioners, but of broken hearts in the struggle for existence. Or it is (as in France) the moral nausea of sated lust, of love idolized, then debased, then a scourge, then the madness of spiritual thirst, and national, universal death. It is not the horror of a bleeding frame, of a crucifixion, but the horror of a "grey, void, lampless, deep, unpeopled world". Yes, the colour of death to our modern mind is not red, but grey. It is death in a desert, not a battle. It is the death horror of an age familiar with shaking creeds, iron laws, and the struggle for existence, with tales of shabby streets, mirthless laughter, and the *ennui* of coarse wealth. It is the horror of an age whose chief trouble is not pain but the fear of it, not acute agony but dull and stony woe, not furious despair but incurable melancholy amid unexampled resource. It is a Hamlet age, with

> Power to transmute all elements, but lack
> Of any power to sway that fatal skill.

It may be good for us, good for our spiritual sensibility, good for our Christian heart, that we should apprehend the reality of Christ's death in terms of the spiritual dialect of our time. We refuse to bow to the spirit of the age, but we ought at least to speak the language of that age, and address it from the Cross in the tone of its too familiar sorrow. It is a mean death that dominates the day, closing much grim and sombre life. The very Titans are tired. The gloom of the pessimist is but the shadow of this weary age, the exhibition of its secret grief. He reveals the thoughts of many hearts, except of course those who resolutely turn away from such things in a hearty optimism which is temperament rather than faith. Many who wait on the Lord only maintain their strength. They do not renew it. They do not run, nor soar. Has the death of Christ nothing in common with that dim vexation, sheer exhaustion, and spiritual dreariness which is our modern death? It is not the death of wrong faith,

but of no faith. Was His not a spiritual ebb, a spiritual death, far more than a physical? Was it not the curse, though not the experience, of unfaith that fell on His faithful soul? The physical death only showed forth the spiritual. It was there that the value lay. And a spiritual death, in absolute obedience, amid an atmosphere of unfaith, when it is really tasted and not merely sipped, means fog and gloom sour and chill, formless fears and failing force—no visions, no raptures, no triumphs, no flush of energy, no heroic glow. That was the blood of Christ. And you cannot dwell too much on the blood of Christ so long as you are sure it was Christ's blood, the Lamb of God carrying the sin of the world. You cannot dwell too long on the death of Christ, however you conceive it, so long as you see it through the resurrection light as the grace of God. You cannot think too much of the universality of death so long as it reveals the infinite universality of grace. Where death abounds there does grace much more abound. A worn and pessimist Europe may be nearer the Kingdom of God than the cruel, lusty, military Europe that creates it. The gloom of to-day may also be nearer the Cross than the pitiless faith of the "Ages of Faith". The blindness when things have been too much for faith is better than the blindness of a faith which will not see at all. Nay, I am not sure that it is not nearer to it than the amateur optimism of mere temperament, or of what is called sound British sense; nearer, too, than a reconciliation which is only philosophic and rational, and does not feel the tragedy enter its soul at all.

He tasted, then, universal death. The wide empire of death went deep into His soul. His soul itself died. It is very tragic, very terrible; as a historic spectacle awful, as a psychological spectacle profound and unique.

But where is the religion of it? Where is its Gospel? That a man should die for men, die in spiritual horror—it is fine, great; but how does it help us, who are dying too, to see the greatest of the sons of men caught and crushed in the whirl of the same wheel as rolls us into mean dust?

So we are led to the real Gospel and glory of the situation.

## III.—DEATH AS GRACE

By the grace of God He tasted universal death. There is a death which is a grace of God. The last mystery of death is the mystery of grace. Behind it is not only the awe of a world unseen, but the depth and wonder of the riches of the wisdom and love of all men's God. Death as the expression of the grace of God becomes neither a penalty nor a problem, but a promise. It is, therefore, the centre, not of a philosophy, but of a religion, a faith.

### I. THE EXEGESIS

You may suggest, perhaps, that the allusion to the grace of God refers not to Christ's bitter taste of death, but to the fact that it was for every man. But there are two things in the passage itself which show that the grace to Christ in His death is here meant: first, the text goes back on the previous phrase, "the suffering of death", picks that up, and enlarges it. It is the death of Christ, His suffering and the glory and perfection of it that is the theme; that is what is being traced to the grace of God, not the vicarious nature of it. It is the blessing of Christ's death to Himself, as the path to His perfecting as Redeemer—it is that which is the theme, and not the blessing of it to us. And then, in the second place, this word grace is taken up in turn in the following verse, (it is all woven music, phrase issuing from phrase) where it says, "For it became Him, the Lord of all, to make the Redeemer perfect by suffering." It became, it befitted, a gracious God, not to bring many sons to glory, not to make the Son the Saviour, but to make the Saviour a perfect Saviour by the extremity of suffering. He gave the Saviour the last grace, the perfection of death. The mystery to a Jew was that God should not only permit, but require, His Messiah, His favourite, His King, to suffer and die. The writer (of Hebrews) has learnt enough of Paul to say boldly that this was not the lack of grace, but the supreme grace, gift and privilege. It was reserved by God for His Son, nay, by God for Himself. It became the Lord of all to die for all. In conferring death on Christ the Father took the Son into His own unapproachable grace and perfection of giving Himself

for the world to the uttermost. The death of Christ was a function, and not merely a commission, of the supreme power, grace and glory. It was an act of God, and not merely of God's agent. God did not send the Son, He came as the Son. What reconciled the world was God in Christ. God does not suffer by deputy, or sacrifice by substitute. It is not His prerogative to receive sacrifices greater than any He makes. He does not delegate redemption; He redeems in the Son with whom He is one. It is no Christian God who sits steamed by the incense of heroic woe or filled with an aesthetic delight in the tragedy of men. The God of Jesus Christ is more of a giver than a receiver. When He gave His Son He gave more, and at more cost, than any but the Son could repay. His blessedness is not to be self-contained, and in Himself enough, but it is to seek and to save. It is more Godlike to give than to receive even life.

### 2. DEATH AS THE GIFT AND GRACE OF GOD

It was by the grace of God He tasted death. And I mean death was there in God's grace to Christ Himself, and not simply to us. You do not suppose that the grace of God only came *through* Christ and was not *to* Christ, that it was ever withdrawn from Christ for our sakes? The face was withdrawn, but never the grace. How could it ever save us if it failed Him? This bitter, dismal taste of death, it was God's grace to Christ. When He tasted death He tasted how gracious the Lord was. "God gave me blindness," said Dr Moon, "as a talent to be used for His service, that I might see the needs of those who could not see." So to Christ God gave the grace of a universal death. "This is my beloved Son," was said to Him in the exaltation of His Baptism; and immediately the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. That was the immediate effect and sign of the Father's good pleasure and total trust. The Father could trust Him in the worst desert of the soul. And amid all Christ knew that and held to it. He knew that when He knew nothing else. All thought of the grandeur of death, the heroism of dying, the beauty of sacrifice, the sweetness of loving devotion, all that fell from His darkened mind. Moral imagination failed, but moral fidelity did not. Obedience stood. He obeyed

the Father even when His love of His brethren had received the shock of desertion. He was never much dependent on visions, but if ever He was they failed Him now. Death blanched them, and they died. But one thing death did not master or quench; it was His faith in the grace of God amid this moral mephitis, the fixed obedience of His will amid the stupefying contagion of universal sin, and the failure of hopes and powers. Death never got the better of Christ's faith in the grace of God. The eclipse of feeling never unhinged His loving will, or His obedience to that grace whatever its form. There was a value and a grace in death which He did not feel, but for which He trusted God; He did not see, but He knew, that He could do nothing of such worth for the kingdom as to succumb and die. The Father would have taken Him from the cross had He asked it—though that would have lost all at the moment which turned all. But He did not ask it. His faith and will held sure when His heart was dim and broken. Death could hide the Father or remove Him, but could not change Him. He did not ask it. He could not ask it. He honoured in His faithfulness unto death a holy law and judgment which were as precious to God as His Holy Son or His unholy prodigal. God would not be God if He loved His own holy nature less than man. Then the Divine death might have been an act of pity, but not of grace. It was by the grace of God that Christ died. It was by the grace of God He tasted death, emptied the cup, realised a world of death. Such at least was Christ's own faith. The darkness was the shadow of the Almighty wing. It was the grace of God that put the cross there—the cross as a state of soul and act of will—together with all the glory that only the cross could win. It is a hard saying, but is it not true? The soul's death and agony of Christ was a grace bestowed on Him by God. He was the captain of all those that have the grace of dying "Ye know *the* grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich yet for our sakes He became poor." Being rich in life yet He became poor unto death. Like all His graces that, too, was God's gift to Him, God's grace. The humiliation of the Cross was the Father's greatest gift to His Son, save one—His resurrection; and that was but its completion. Do not doubt that it was a grace of God to Him. It was a gift that He alone could carry.

### 3. THE FASCINATION OF DEATH

Heaven was peopled with millions, who would have vied with each other for a grace from their King like this—to be sent to die for men—had any death but the Son of God availed. But none of them could by any means redeem, nor give a ransom. The redemption of the soul is costly, and must be let alone by them for ever. It was the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

"Death cannot be an evil," says Schiller, "being so universal." That is a poet's optimism—the optimism of a philosophic poet who did not live with the miserable many. It is a fine saying. There are stages of culture to which it comes broad, profound, and beautiful; yet it is not true. It is hardly even a half truth. It is not true of pain. It is not true to the moral sense of the race; it is not true to its most universal experience, nor to the experience of those most to be regarded. It was not true to the moral soul of that Hebrew race which produced the living conscience of mankind; it was not true to the experience of Buddhism; it is not true to the philosophy which at least has a heart for the world's sorrow and a conscience not to be smoothed by the dialectic of pure reason, or the process of the pure idea. I mean the humane and hopeless philosophy of Pessimism, so gloomy because so much more full of heart and insight than of faith. And it is not true to the faith and experience of the Christian Church. The universality of death is an aggravation of its evil; the commonness of death is but the increase of its bitterness. There is but one condition in which death is not an evil. It is when it becomes the supreme organ of revelation; then it is more than revelation; it delivers men from itself. It is redemption. Death is the last evil and enemy till it become the supreme organ of the grace of God in the cross of Christ. The death of Christ has redeemed death itself. It has immortalised mortality. The last enemy becomes the greatest vassal. Saul turns Paul. And man's extremity is God's opportunity.

To many of the greatest there has been a fascination, yea, even a distinction, about death, as the *locus* of the great secret, as the final problem whose answer answers all. Where the carcase was there were eagles ever. Even if they could not solve it they had

an instinct that the solution of humanity lay there in what seemed its dissolution. It is our weakness, not our strength, that consents to the agnosticism of the grave, to death as complete erasure. Faith and philosophy, as well as valour, feel this spell, this call to wring power from death, and wrest meat from the eater. To take the philosophies only, it is those that feel its fascination, yea, its misery, most that are most akin in feeling to the sympathies of faith. I have referred to systematic pessimism. Christianity is not pessimist. But it has attachments in pessimism which it has not in optimism. There is more sympathetic affinity. To grapple with death is at least to shake the door of grace. The optimist philosophy, whose watchwords are reason and reconciliation, does not seize the public need like that whose note is will and its process Redemption. There is a realism and a humanity in the latter, pessimist though it be, which savours more of the true Cross. The way to the soul's final greatness lies through its misery rather than through its success. The grace of God comes home most mightily to those who have looked to it through the desperations, and not only the contradictions of life. The misery of the soul never seemed so terrible and hopeless as it did to the eye of grace. It was the pessimism of God that moved Him to redeem. "When there was no eye to pity and no arm to save, then His own eye pitied and His own arm brought salvation." The light that saved was the light that best showed the hell it saved from. For this reason Christianity can never be pessimist; because we never see the very worst until we have been saved from it into the best, and view it with the eyes of its Saviour. None can realise hell but a redeemer, however many may suffer it. The pity of the Saviour is more than all pity of Buddha, or the ingenious self-pity of the modern soul. It pities from its height of holiness a sinfulness which is much more pitiful than the sorrow felt by the humane heart of a sympathetic man. He who emerges above man feels man more than he who is immersed in himself. Must he not also feel more than a total humanity could feel with nothing but itself to be immersed in?

Unless above himself he can
Erect himself how poor a thing is man.*

* Wordsworth: *The Excursion* (Preface).

To be lost *in* self—is it not to be lost *to* self? And if this occur on the scale of the whole race great must be the fall thereof.

Yes, there is a fascination in death—else there were no heroes and no martyrs—and it does not exist for the human soul alone. For even to the Divine mind itself there was this attraction of the Cross, this invitation, this challenge from death, this insight of death's resources under compulsion, this power to pluck the jewel life from the jaws of death. For God Himself there was this sense of opportunity, of capability in death to be the organ of grace, the way of glory, and the perfecting of the soul. But the resources were not in death itself, but in the use Godhead could make of it. The universal Grace, seeking its opening, seized on the thing in man most universal—more universal even than love. And that was death. For there are some who love not, but none who do not die. Death and grace made one salvation. The evening and the morning are one day. Darkness and light are both alike to God, and together involve the revolution of the world. The universality of death was the only experience adequate to the universality of grace. It was the only experience wide and solemn enough. That it was a universal enemy was but another fascination to a divine and holy love that felt in itself all power to cope with human ill. If evil was to be destroyed it should be mastered in its great stronghold, its most paralysing form, its fortress in the dismal fen. The wages of sin should become the seed of holiness, and what sin dreaded most faith should trust and use still more. Love, to appear exceeding lovely, dared to die. It consented to weakness and horror as the condition of all might. All! "All things are delivered to me of My Father." And at the bottom of this Pandora gift was death. His greatness was a doom. He was buffeted in kindness. Love tasted death that it might overpass love and be worshipped as grace. The depth of need was sounded by the fulness of power. And the range of universal death should be at least no less than the realm of universal grace. Nothing the heart could experience should be beyond the Saviour whose triumph the heart should trust.

### 4. DEATH AND GRACE AS EXPERIENCE AND TRUST

Experience and trust, death and grace—can they be co-equal powers?

The trouble of the time is this—that we are more universal in our thought and experience than we are in our faith. Our experience is wider than our faith. Death is wider than grace. Our ideas are wider than our real religion. Our culture is wider than our actual creed. Our crises overwhelm our Christ. Men range the world with ships, trains, and wires. They range the universe with microscope, telescope, and spectrum. They explore human nature with the aid of genius, and they go far in that knowledge of the soul which comes of culture. History and geography, science and literature, serve us as they never did before. We are cosmopolitan, but are we really universal? We go far, but do we go deep? We have more experience than we have faith to carry. If masses are under-educated, masses are over-educated. Their resources submerge their conscience. And their conscience itself outruns their ethics. Men see a right which they cannot make a habit, or pass into public use. Their knowledge of the world is so great that it actually belittles their world. The more they know of it the less they think of it. Prosperity brings leanness of soul and meanness of ideal. The more they know of men the less they respect man. The more they see the less they believe. The more their experience the less their faith in the great faiths, hopes and gospels. They like broad views, often because these seem to make less demand on their bankrupt souls.

Men come, for instance, to know the dark races as a colonist might. They have dealings with them. And the experience is too much for faith many a time. The black man who tries their English patience, they say, is incurable. Christianity only makes him more intractable and more insufferable. He is not the man for whom Christ died. Missions are a mistake. They must make way for politics. The apostle shall go no further than the diplomatist allows. And it would simplify trade much if he did not go at all. Let him practice philanthropy and so reduce the rates at home. Christianity is a gospel only for the superior races. Well, that is the universality of mere experience conquering the universalism

of faith. And in this respect the villager of faith and love with his missionary-box is more universal than the travelled peer, the colonial colossus, the imperialist millionaire.

Another man goes sympathetically into the dark places of Europe, of England. He finds rascality and suffering such as he had never dreamed of. He is filled with impotent rage against the order of society. It is oppression, misery and death everywhere, except among the prosperous. And even among them it is only a worse and more heartless death. His faith was only enthusiasm, and it fails him. It was only sympathy, milk of human kindness, and it goes sour. His experience is too much for his faith. For him the grace of God is not upon sorrow and death. The cross weighs down the very Redeemer. The cross is on the Redeemer; the Redeemer is not upon the cross. The cross is crushing the Redeemer; He does not rise from His cross.

Or another man, ardent for well-doing, falls into disease. He is powerless to help in any good. He lingers in the misery of impatience and impotence. His depression deepens. He feels but earth's sorrow. He tastes death daily, but he never assimilates it. He is never reconciled to it. It is because he is not reconciled by it. He lies on a mattress-grave. He is not transfigured on a mountain apart. Christ even seems to him to die in the common martyrdom, not in the universal Redemption. Death is not surmounted by grace. It is not the organ of grace. His experience has mastered his faith. His ideas are more universal than his creed. His heart is greater than his God. He carries in his sympathy a larger world than he lives in by his faith. And there is more curse for him in this world than grace, just in proportion as he is in earnest. And it is all because he has taken everything more in earnest than he has taken Christ. He despises the theologians, it may be, but he lets them rule him and even enslave him. Because he rejects their christ he lets himself be without a christ, or he consents to an ineffectual christ. The theologians have, at least, this advantage as yet, that they have the effectual Christ—the Christ that works. The non-theological christ is popular; he wins votes; but he is not mighty; he does not win souls; he does not break men into small pieces and create them anew. The martyrdom of Christ was never so respected as it is to-day. The name

of Jesus, they say, is cheered in the East-end, and is no bad passport in the West. The clergy are socially welcome. The religion of suffering has even literary patronage; there is money in it at the theatres under the sign of the Cross; and the Church, as a branch of the public service and the social order, is treated with some deference in the writers' clubs. But it is a spectacular Christ throughout. And His kingdom is not spectacular. It cometh not with observation. It is within you. Nor is the spectacle of Christ on His cross in itself enough to lift men from their misery, break them of self, or release them from the malady of their time. The crucifix, as the apotheosis of sorrow, may even be but the greatest of earth's burdens. It is possible so to view the Cross as to carry more of the world's woe into it than we receive from it of redeeming grace. Nay, it is natural to do so. It is the natural thing to recognize in the dying Christ but a fellow-sufferer (even if He be the classic one), a fellow-victim of the death we die. Death is wider to include Christ than Christ is to include death. We see easily the misery of the world upon the Cross of Christ. What it is not easy to see is the Cross of Christ upon the misery, and upon the misery *of the world*. It is no natural vision that sees that.

## ROMANTIC RELIGION AND TRAGIC

I speak of the misery of the world. I have spoken throughout of the misery of the world. I have heard the whole creation groan. I have presumed on an instructed sympathy which does not measure human life by our own lot, or pronounce upon destiny just by our own experience, or our friends'. Who does not know the fatal trivialist who makes every discussion of principles or ideas vanish in the sand as he narrates a series of petty incidents from his petty career; or smothers it in a dust storm of his relatives ground fine. The relevant thing is not this and that man's groping. The great Scripture is not of private interpretation. I have been speaking of the soul as the human soul, not as this or that man's experience. And if I have spoken of a misery which is not in this land organized into a creed, of a squalor which has only partially infected our literature from other lands, why is it otherwise among us? Why, because of a

freedom to worship, think, act, and combine, chiefly due to the Free Churches and their witness of free grace. When I picture the world-woe as it comes home to Church-ridden lands, or to the genius of unfaith, I say that it is not easy to see the Cross of Christ upon the misery and sin of the world—it is not natural, it is entirely supernatural, it is not human, it is quite superhuman. It is a miraculous vision that sees in that Martyr more than a martyr—a Healer; and in the Healer more—the Redeemer. To see sin, sorrow, and death continually under the Cross, to see the grace of God triumphing over them in it, is the very soul and victory of faith. It is possible to see a beauty in sacrifice which draws the young imagination that way bent into a certain enthusiasm and imitation of the Cross. The high, but hollow, naturalism of George Eliot had room for the action on Maggie Tulliver of Thomas à Kempis. But that is a faith too æsthetic or too subjective for the stay and victory of the thorough-going soul over the last moral horrors of the world. In London, in one twenty-four hours, there is more, if we knew it, than a faith like that could bear. And even when we come to very close quarters with Christ crucified the savour of the Cross may but deepen the sad tone of many a morbid soul; it may fix the hue and habit of eclipse upon the pious heart, in spite of fitful gleams of cheer and joy. There is much more in the Cross than such a darkling faith has fathomed. The infinite, ultimate love of God is there. The gift and grace of God for the whole world is there. It is not simply nor chiefly the love of Christ for His brethren that is in the Cross. That was indeed uppermost in Christ's life; but in His death that is not direct but indirect; and the primary thing is Christ's obedience to God, and His action, therefore, as the channel of God's redeeming love. It is the love of God for the godless, loveless, hating world that is there. And it is there, not simply expressed but effected, not exhibited but enforced and infused, not in manifestation merely, but in judgment and decision. The last judgment, in the sense of the ultimate Divine verdict on sin, is already by. It was passed in the Cross of Christ, where sin was condemned once for all. All future judgment is but the working out of this. The prince of this world is already judged. He acts to-day as a power, indeed, but only as a doomed

power. His sentence went out in the Cross. And he knows it. Humanity was rescued from him there. The crisis of man's spiritual destiny is there. The *opus operatum* of history is there. It is not simply revelation, but revelation as redemption. It does not *show*, it *does*. It is not displayed for refining effect upon our moral nature, it is in action for our spiritual recreation andre generation. Do not empty such words as these of their fundamental and searching significance. Beware of the watering of the Christian stock. Do not let the litterateurs and poets capture, pare, and monopolise them to fit their range of experiences; as if renunciation were the Cross, sacrifice were faith, and purification were the Holy Ghost. The Christ is He who came by water and by blood; not by water only but by water and by blood; not for purification so much as for salvation, nor for refinement so much as for redemption. When we read of the rowdy American hero that

> Christ isn't going to be too hard
> On a man that died for men,*

it is clever poetry, but it is mawkish piety; it has the blight of affectation and unreality upon it, like much literary heroism. Faith does not lend itself to literature except with geniuses of the very first rank, like Dante or Milton, to whose commanding intellects theology is the envisagement of the things most gracious, searching, and sublime. Redemption by the grace of God in the Cross of Christ, regeneration by the Spirit of God in His Church—these are things deeper than literature can go or philosophy expound. There are few dangers threatening the religious future more serious than the slow shallowing of the religious mind towards the literary shore, the stranding of faith, and the bleaching of its ribs—the desiccation, by even religious culture, of words which won their wealth from experiences stirred by the New Testament when it was not viewed as literature at all, but as the very Word of God. *Tendimus in altum.* Our safety is in the deep. The lazy cry for simplicity is a great danger. It indicates a frame of mind which is only appalled at the great things of God, and a senility of faith which fears that which is

* *Jim Bludso:* Pike County Ballads, John Hay, Boston, 1886.

high. Men complain that they are jaded and cannot rise to such matters. That may mean that the matters of the world absorb all the energies of the great side of the soul, that Divine things are no more than a comfort. And if so, it means much for the future of religion, and much that is ominous. And the poverty of our worship amid its very refinements, its lack of solemnity, poorly compensated by an excess of tenderness and taste, is the fatal index of the peril. We do need more reverence in our prayer, more beauty in our praise, less dread of tried and consecrated form. But still more do we want the breathless awe, and the stammering tongue, and the solemn wonder, and the passionate gratitude, which are the true note of grace, and the worship of a soul plucked from the burning and snatched by a miracle from the abyss. We want the new song of those who stand upon the rock, taken from the fearful pit and the miry clay, with the trembling still upon them and the slime still moist. We want the devotion of men whom grace found, and scarcely saved, in the jaws of death, and took from the belly of hell. We want more joy, but more of the joy of men who have tasted death either in their own conscience or in the communion of their Redeemer's. We need it to make Faith what in some of its popular forms it is ceasing in any imperial way to be—a power and a passion in authority among the passions and powers of the race. We want a Gospel to give conscience might, where it is owned to have right. We could dispense with some of its pathos if we changed it for more of its power. There is no persuasiveness like that of men who have known the terror of the Lord. There is no reason so authoritative as supernatural grace—amazing and incomprehensible.

### 5. THE MYSTERY OF INIQUITY AND THE MIRACLE OF MERCY

The mystery of iniquity who can understand? Sin is utterly irrational. Death none can comprehend, for we can question none who have returned from the grave. Sorrow is hard to bear, and harder still to explain; for the good and pure have an ache of their own in a world like this when all the common sources of pain are stilled. But to comprehend is not to forgive, to explain is not to redeem. The grace of God is not only unaccountable,

but if it could be accounted for it would cease to be sovereign grace. Faith is in its very nature faith in a miracle. To challenge miracle without leaving in the net result a profounder sense of the essential miracle of grace and fate is poor service to the Gospel or the soul. It is miracle far more than reason that feeds the soul. No treatment of the miracles should ignore that; no fate of theirs can alter that. It is the evangelical nerve of Christianity and the marrow of the Gospel. To give up miracle is to leave the field to magic. God's attitude to such as we are is an eternal anomaly, and the Christian life is miraculous or it is nothing. Atonement ceases to be religious when it is offered as explanation. The justifier can never justify himself at any human bar. Nothing can justify justifying grace. Sin, grief, death, and grace make a standing rebuke to our lust of lucidity, our rational religion, and our passion to explain. The Lord of death and grace does not explain till we are inexplicably blessed in Him; and then our thought is for ever far in the wake of our faith and our worshipping love.

### EVOLUTION AND REVOLUTION

Do not turn, then, from the awful horror of the Cross, or you will lose the solemn power of it. Do not say it is morbid to look so much on the Cross in its contact with human despair. It is the one death which is charged with more grace and power for the human soul than all the blithe and vigorous enterprise of the world. It is the one death which has taken control of human life; as, indeed, it is the ruling and interpreting point for the life of Christ Himself. It has made the whole of human history simply an ante-chamber of the spiritual world; and the grace of God revealed in the Cross contains more of His nature and purpose than all our inductions from the experience of the race. It has graven upon the soul the conviction not only that the Cross is for man, but that man is for the Cross. The grace of God in the death of Christ has, indeed, revealed the principle of sacrifice as an essential, or even supreme, factor in human progress. The Cross is there for man in that sense. It is the classic case of the sacrifice that makes human greatness. But it is much more than that, and has done more. It has changed the nature of man's greatness. It has changed the spiritual centre of gravity, and

moved it outside of humanity altogether. It has changed man's own spiritual place. It has made man a contributor to the Cross even more than the Cross a contributor to man. It has made man owe himself, and not merely his religious progress, to the Cross and God's grace in it. Man belongs by right to the Cross even more than the Cross to man. The whole question of the time as to a spiritual world concerns not so much its existence, but its place. The day is over when materialism could challenge its existence, except among those scientists who are not thinkers, but only the skilled artisans of the intellect or the chief clerks of mind. The better culture of the age has outgrown the negation of a spiritual realm, and the question is as to its place. Does it belong to man, or does man belong to it? Is humanity its king or its subject? Is it to glorify man, or man to glorify it? Is it a department of human culture, swelling the triumph of a humanity still on the summit of things? Or is it a world which holds man, and which all his culture obeys? We raise that question to a higher place, and we make it more definite, when we ask it about the Cross of Christ and its grace of God. But it is the same question. It is always the chief question of the age that is put and answered by the Cross. Does the Cross belong to man, or does man belong to the Cross? Is the grace of God only a factor in human evolution, or is it the condition of all evolution, and its destiny as well, its source and goal in one? Is the Cross *a* grace or *the* grace? Is faith in Christ a department of the soul, or is it the total energy of the soul? Does it serve the soul, or is it the soul in service? Is the Church but one of the public services? Is Christ a sectional interest, or is He the soul's new world? Did He die to promote human welfare on the noblest of natural lines, or to redeem us to a new nature? Did the Cross mean a new departure or a new creature? Evolution or Revolution? Is the Cross the spiritualizing of the old man or the creation of a new man? Is grace the transfiguration of nature, or the foundation of a kingdom on the ruins of nature? Yea, within the Church itself, within the Christianity of the time, the question must arise. Among those who believe the gospel the issue must be sharpened, and put thus: Does the gospel carry the Cross, or the Cross carry the gospel? In the beginning was—what? the Word or the Deed?

Is it the gospel of love that carries in its hand the act of grace, or is it the act of grace that carries for the soul the gospel of love? Is the prime object of faith Fatherly love or Redeeming grace?

To questions like these there is but one answer when we come to the core of faith. Man belongs to the Cross much more than the Cross belongs to man. Christ did not die to exhibit, but to act; nay, to create. He did not die to show how deep and fine the Cross was in human nature, if we would be true to ourselves; but to effect in human nature a total change and bring to pass its death into a new life, its life into a new lord. The new master made a new man, and not a reformed man. The Cross has far more claim upon man than man upon the Cross. The poetry of man uses the Cross for man; for its chief interest is man. But the religion of man uses man for the Cross; for its ruling interest is the grace of God, the holy God, the Redeemer. And in the grace of God there lies a destiny for the soul through faith which, as it was achieved by faith when all high imagination had failed and died, so transcends all that imagination can surmise, art body forth, or imperious wills achieve. It is the Cross which carries the gospel, not the gospel the Cross. In the beginning was the Word as eternal Deed. There is no real revelation of the gospel of Fatherly love but in the grace of forgiveness by the Cross. Revelation to such as us is impossible, except as Redemption. The sense for it has to be created. It is not revelation that redeems so much as redemption that reveals. The soul realizes its greatness less in what is shown it of the love of God than in what is done for it by the grace of God.

### 6. THE GREATNESS OF HUMAN NATURE AND OF ITS REDEMPTION

Oh, we are shut up into a greatness which is not of us at all!

Life is great, and death is great, and love is stronger than death; but great beyond all is the grace which is eternal life to us from the dead, and a new self beyond ourselves.

The world is great and the soul is great, and great is the soul's mastery of the world; but greater than soul can say is the grace that masters the soul and recreates the will for a life beyond life.

We inherit greatness and breathe it. Earth and sky and day and night; stars in the naked heavens, breathings of wind, and the coming of spring; hill and plain, rolling tracts, and river and sea; the mist on the long, wet moor, and above it the black, baleful cloud; fleets and camps, cities and realms; valour and power, science, trade, churches, causes, arts, charities; the fidelities of peace and the heroisms of war, the rhythm of order and the stream of progress; the generations that go under and the civilizations that survive; the energies unseen, the vanished past, the forgotten and the unforgettable brave; the majesty of the moral hero and the splendour of the public saint; agonies, love, and man's unconquerable mind—Oh, we have a great world, great glories, great records, great prospects and great allies! We inherit greatness, and we inhabit promise. The capitalized legacies of the past and the condensed suffering of the many become in us an instinct of greatness which moves us to an unapprehended destiny. The brave possess the earth, and the noble are at home in the glorious natural world.

Winds blow and waters roll
Strength to the brave, and power, and deity.

But as our sun rises there is a rising cloud. In the moving soul there is a frail seam, an old wound, a tender sore. The stout human heart has a wearing ache and a haunting fear. There is a hollow in the soul's centre, in its last hold no fortress, and in its sanctuary no abiding God. A vanity blights the glory of time, a lameness falls on the strenuous wing, our sinew shrinks at certain touches, and we halt on our thigh; pride falters, and the high seems low, and the hour is short, and the brief candle is out, and what is man that he is accounted of? There is a day of the Lord upon all that is haughty, on lofty tower, and tall cedar, and upon all pleasant imagery. And misery, sin, and death grow great as all our triumph dwindles on the sight. They baffle the wisdom of the wise, and they are stronger than the valour of the brave. The City heroes are feasted in the morning, and the City streets are a hell at night. And the heart's cheer fails, and love yields to death, and we cannot, cannot bear it. Memory turns to terror—not only for lost love but lost purity. Conscience belittles all

greatness, and submerges it all by the greatness of its law, evermore saying, Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God of Hosts; and by the greatness of its cry, My wound, my wound! My grievous sin and my desolate end.

The greatness of the soul is more apparent in the greatness of its misery than in the triumph of its powers. Our spiritual failure is more than all our mighty doings. We achieve at last—oblivion and a grave; at the most a progress never realised; because each generation bequeaths to the next more hope than peace—if even hope. Then cometh the end.

And the end—what is it?

It is the Christ of God, the Saviour. We taste death, we feel decay, we face judgment. And what is the judgment of God on human guilt and woe? Lift up your eyes, lift up your hearts. Behold the Lamb of God! It is the Saviour. Christ is God's judgment on the world. Our judgment is our salvation. His chastisement is our peace. We deserved death, and death He gave us—the death of the cross. The end of all is the grace unspeakable, the fulness of glory— all the old splendour fixed, with never a one lost good; all the spent toil garnered, all the fragments gathered up, all the lost love found for ever, all the lost purity transfigured in holiness, all the promises of the travailing soul now yea and amen; all progress already possessed, all works immortalised in faith, all sin turned to salvation, all the labour and sorrow hallowed, the tears and gore of the ages flowing as the saving water and blood.

> For all the blood that's shed upon earth
> Runs through the springs o' that countrie.*

All things are for our sakes, that the abundant grace might turn to the glory of God.

And, even now, eternal thanks be unto God, who hath given us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by His grace, the taste of life for every man.

* Scottish Ballad, Thomas the Rhymer.

# THE LIVING CHRIST

# THE LIVING CHRIST

"Fear not: I am the first and the last, and the living one. I was dead; and see, I am alive for evermore; and have the keys of the unseen and of death."—Rev. i. 17, 18.

This is a bundle of paradoxes—contradictions which do not exclude but include each other; nay, which *need* each other.

It is thus that God includes and needs man; the infinite strength needs and includes infinite weakness. To meet our weakness God did not stoop *from* Himself, but *in* Himself.

So also God is the least apparent and yet the most real of powers in the world and life. No God—atheism—is the most plausible and the most incredible of creeds.

Thus also Christ is the most provoking and elusive of beings, but the most haunting, the least to be got rid of. To mere inquiry how fugitive, to faith how near, how steady, how mighty, for time and for eternity! And the cross of Christ, the great absurdity of history, is the centre and solution of history.

Christian faith is a mass of contradictions and a glorious tissue of harmony. It is easy to make it seem ridiculous to common sense. But it is fatal for religion to appeal to common sense.

Our faith is faith in a Christ who is and who is not, in a dead man who is our living God, in the living God who died, in one who was humiliated into eternal exaltation, who in extremest weakness realized and revealed the supreme power of heaven and earth.

What is this faith in this Christ?

It is faith:—

I. In a historic Christ.

II. In a living Christ.

III. In a Christ personal to each of us.

## I.—THE HISTORIC CHRIST

There *was* such a man. The story of Him is not an invention. Even if it were conceded that everything told of Him is not literally true, *He* was a reality. His figure is real and palpable in history. There is a distinct and powerful character among the great figures of the past—called Jesus, living in a certain land, at a certain time, with certain aims, doctrines, actions, ways of life, and manner of death.

Moreover, this man is prolonged into posterity. He has had a vast influence in history. You could not deny *that*, even if you were among those that reject the influence for themselves.

But no serious mind or conscience either denies or deplores that influence in the past as a whole. To deplore Christ is to renounce the right to moral consideration. Even if He is not the Redeemer, He has been a vast blessing. He deserves more attention and gratitude than Plato, Aristotle, Dante, Shakespeare, Newton, or any of the heroes of culture and civilization. He has done more for the race, for humanity as humanity. Even if you question His power in eternity, you cannot deny the blessing He has been for time, through those who believed in Him as above and beyond time.

None of the most precious boons of civilization would have been here to-day without Christianity, without Christ. He came in and raised a new civilization out of the wreck of the old. He saved the soul of the old, moreover. Christian Europe has lost nothing essential from Greece or Rome. And it enshrines and embalms their soul. That would remain true, even if His new civilization was presently going to be superseded. It is Christianity that is the continuity of the old world and the new. And it is Christianity that has made the modern nations and all their achievements possible.

Especially is this so with the achievements of love and their growth. There is much to disappoint, especially in the spectacle of modern Europe—the Europe of the newspapers. But even there, ask what would have been had Christianity not come in when it did, had it not worked in these centuries as the principle it is. It has failed to put down war. It has even caused some wars

and bitter persecutions. So far, yes. But it has done so chiefly by the infection and corruption of political ideas and methods. Politics have well nigh destroyed Christianity. But the tide has really turned, though not much more. Politics have begun to undergo conversion. The recent Machiavelism of some Christian states has shocked the Christian conscience, and roused more than a few to feel that if Christianity do not master the State, the State will destroy Christianity. This has long been apparent in Church politics; it is now coming slowly home in the politics of the State. And as to war, there is nothing else that even promises to put down war. Democracy and self-interest do not do so, and do not tend to do so. Democracies are even more liable to fits of blind passion than monarchs. And it should be remembered that it was the Christian pulpit and the Christian principle in the press and elsewhere that recently prevented a war between the two great democracies of the world.*

There is a Europe, there is a Christendom which does not appear in the newspapers, even in the religious press. Journalism is not so much blind to it as shy of it. It is of vast, silent, spreading influence. It is the Europe, the Christendom of Faith—the civilization of the Spirit, the true Church of the heart and soul. That is the Europe, the America, that makes the real difference from the past, the real promise for the future. It is the Europe that most directly owns the influence of Christ in its heart, its conduct, its faith, and its hope, in life private and public.

Nobody has ever exerted such an influence, whether you like it or whether you do not. And it is an effect produced by One who went in the face of human nature. He gave effect, it is true, to certain vast, deep human *tendencies*; but so far as human *prejudices and tastes* go, He went in their teeth. Here is what Professor Freeman said: "You say, Am I still a believer? Certainly. That is, I believe the Christian religion to be from God, in a sense beyond that in which all things are from God. One cannot study history without seeing this. The fact that there was a Holy Roman Empire—that is, the fact that the Roman Empire

* In 1895 a grave dispute between Britain and the United States of America, concerning the boundaries of Venezuela, was eventually settled by arbitration, largely through the influence of the American journalist Godkin, editor of the *New York Evening Post.*

could ever become holy in a Christian sense—is enough. ... I compare it with Islam, which is in the like sort the Arabian religion, the religion of all countries that have come under Arabian influences, and of none other. But mark the difference. Islam succeeds by the most obvious causes; by appealing to all that was good and bad in the Arab of the seventh century. Christianity, on the other hand, went right in the teeth of all that was good and bad in the Roman of the fourth century. Yet it succeeded; and I cannot account for its success by any ordinary cause. As I said in one of my published lectures, 'For Cæsar Augustus to be led to worship a crucified Jew was a greater miracle than the cleaving of rocks or the raising of the dead."

What a personality that was! If you only study it as a historian might Napoleon, it is an incomparable personality. Think of all that has come from Christ in the way of blessing, in the way of counterworking the curse and corruption, and error which His very followers have infused into His name. Think out with just and careful appreciation the blessing flowing directly from His memory and influence to-day. What a personality! And you cannot get more out than was in. If so much has been got out, how much must there have been in that miraculous soul! And how much remains!

All this may be recognised by a dead faith, what you might call the plebeian faith of the ordinary able man, a poor but honest faith, a faith merely historic and intelligent, as a mere matter of observation. Christ as a historic force is now on a height from which He can never again be displaced. So much the new study of history has done.

But this is hardly faith. it is not living faith. It is not the kind of response Christ died to evoke. It is not the kind of faith that has made even its own meagre kind possible. It is not the kind that has perpetuated His influence, and made His power survive deep in the general heart of man.

On some who study Christ as a mere figure in history there dawns another kind of influence from Him. They begin as historians, as critics; they end as sympathizers, advocates, enthusiasts. They came to embalm Him with their spices, and they stay to worship, and return to confess. They are touched, seized,

suborned as His witnesses. They can no more be as impartial as if it were Napoleon, Socrates. The ordinary able man may merely discuss Him. The prizeman, in the pulpit or elsewhere, may make of Him a declamation. But no human-hearted man, no man of soul can really be impartial in dealing with Christ. Our sympathies are engaged, captured, preoccupied. We cannot hold this Man at arm's length. The historic Christ stirs in humane minds a faith, a response, which makes mere criticism difficult or impossible. The critic yields to the discovery that this awful and ultimate critic of his soul never judged men impartially, but always with a bias in their favour, and with a view to their escape. "The Lord is our Judge ... He will save us." We cannot view Him in dry light, or discuss Him in cold blood. There comes forth the prelude of a living faith. This Man acts on the heart. He wakes admiration, fear, love, and, above all, faith, trust. He is found to haunt life as no other does. He becomes an unseen spectator and standard of all we do and devise. His beauty, terror, dignity, and invincibility pervade us. His love, mercy, faithfulness, master us. His indomitable grace survives death and rises again in us. He becomes an imaginative ideal, and then a moral imperative. His principle of Divine Sonship becomes the base of a new religion.

But this is a principle which is inseparable from His Person. He introduced it into history, and He goes down the stream of history with it in His soul. He carries it; it does not carry Him. He does not set it afloat and leave it. Where it is He is. Where He is, it is. Through Him it circulates among leal hearts as current coin. But many separate the two. They are at a stage at which they answer to His principle more than to His Person. They think more of His present legacy than of His present life. Christianity is not for them identical with Christ. He is beautiful, sublime, wise, wonderful, mighty; He affects them strangely, and more than they quite realise and own. He is Preacher, He is Example; nay, He is the incarnation of His principle. But He is not yet the incarnation of God. They do not yet say, "My Lord and my God."

Now these have no dead faith. Yet they have not a living faith: they are

"Wandering between two worlds, one dead,
The other powerless to be born."*

They are much more than critics and historians. But they are not yet the property of Christ, slaves like Paul, devotees like John. They believe in the Christ that lived and was dead. But they do not believe in the absolute Victor, Redeemer, and King, in the Christ that liveth for evermore, with the keys of hell and death. A living faith is not mere sympathy with a historic Christ. It is not admiration, reverence, love of that great ideal. It is not the acceptance of His principle, or the assent to His truth. Nay, response to a merely historic Christ is not adequate even to that Christ. It does not meet His claims. It is not the whole response His teaching wakes, or His work evokes, or His character compels, or His soul sought. Faith in the Christian principle is not the living faith in Christ. We may hold truth as it is in Jesus, and miss it as Jesus, miss Jesus as Himself the Truth alive for evermore.

## II.—THE LIVING CHRIST

When we speak of the difference between a dead faith and a living, what we really mean is a difference in the *object* of our faith more than in its kind. The object determines the kind. The great fundamental difference is between a dead Christ and a living. Living faith is faith in a living Christ. It is only a living Christ that calls out a living faith, a faith with stay and power—especially power.

Do not fret yourself examining your faith, trying its limbs, feeling its pulse, watching its colour, measuring its work. See rather that it is set on a living Christ. Care for that Christ and He will care for your faith. Realise a living Christ, and He will produce in you a living faith. Visit His holy sepulchre in Scripture, and as you pore and wait He will surprise you from behind with His immortal life. A living faith, a living Christianity, a living Christendom, means a living Christ. Christianity is more than Christendom, but Christ is more than Christianity. The truth of Christ is more than its appreciation by any age of the

* Matthew Arnold: *Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse.*

Christian Church. But Christ Himself is more than Christianity. He is more than any truth that can be told about Him, any principle He embodies, or any deeds done in His name. Faith in Christ is faith neither in Christendom (or a Church) nor in Christianity (or a system of creed or conduct). But it is faith in the practical reality of His unseen Person, now living, reigning, guiding from His unseen throne the history and the hearts of men to the Kingdom of God.

He acts in many ways. He acts by His historic character. He acts by His historic Church. But still more He acts by His Eternal Person and Holy Ghost. This living Lord is invisible, invincible, and immortal; He is royal, and at the last irresistible; He is infinitely patient because of infinite power and grace; He acts not only on the large course of human events, but directly on living souls and wills, whether humble or refractory; and He rejoices alike in the love of His Father and the love of His Redeemed, and in the communion of both.

To realize this is more than faith in a historic Christ. But it is what faith in a historic Christ arrives at when it grows up and comes to its own, when it finds its true self and soul, its meaning and fulness, its wisdom and stature in an eternal light.

Why may I say so? Is it all a piece of pulpit dogmatism?

The Christian preacher is bound to say it because it is certain that Christ believed and said it.

He believed and said He was more than a historic servant of God raised for a temporary purpose and then done with. He knew and said that He was before the world ("Before Abraham was, I am"), and that He would outlive the world and be King of the adoring love of the souls He made His own. All things were delivered to Him of His Father. And all things include sin, death, the devil, and mankind. "All power is given Me in heaven and on earth." He would be with His own as the Father was with Him. He went to prepare a place for them, and would come again to take them to it. From heaven He would be still on earth in His kingdom, to watch, guide, and bless. Without Him they could do nothing. And such doctrine does not depend on the fourth gospel alone.

What did all that kind of teaching mean? Either that He was

what I have said, or that He was the victim of some egoistic delusion. But if He was a megalomaniac of this kind, what is the worth of His teaching on all else? If He was deceived about Himself, how can you put any value on what He said about the Father, about man, about the world? "Is He to be believed when He spoke of everything but Himself?" Nay, if He was deluded about Himself when He made Himself so central to His truth, He is trustworthy about nothing, and only suggestive in greater or less degree.

You cannot stop with faith in a merely historic Christ if you are in earnest about the matter. Your heart will not let you, and your reason will not. Your historic Christ was one who called Himself much more than historic. And if He was wrong, then He ceases to be an object of entire admiration, and becomes an object of some pity. He exercises our patience, and not our trust. Faith in a *merely* historic Christ destroys itself because it makes Christ a mistaken enthusiast. And no mistaken enthusiast can be an object of faith. Unless, indeed, you think so meanly of human nature that you can believe that for centuries it has made a God of such a soul, and taken His craze for its creed, till we have found Him out to-day.

To treat Christ as a mere historic person is not Christianity. It is another gospel from the whole Church's, from the New Testament's, from Christ's own.

Humanity will never part with Christ now. But it can only keep Him by taking His word on a point like this. If it do not trust Him there, it dissolves Him, and cannot hold Him even as a hero or a saint, to say nothing of a Saviour. He becomes less than the ideal man of yesterday if He be not the Redeemer and King to-day and for ever.

If you dismiss Him because He is in collision with the laws of your universe, these laws must not be denied. But are they the laws of the soul as well? Must your soul not be told that He too is a universe, and not simply a fact, or a factor, in ours? If He enter life, it is that life may enter Him. He is a world within the world, the destiny awaiting the world, the truth which the world is working out. He is the order within the order of things, prescribing their order at the last.

"That one Face, far from vanish rather grows,
Or decomposes but to recompose,
Become my universe that feels and knows."*

Such is living faith in a living Christ. If such a soul live, it must be as Eternal King of the spiritual world. Redeemed Humanity would for ever elect Him King if they could forget that it was He who elected them. He is King, Law, and Principle of the spiritual world. Or else He is lost. His reign is either absolute or doomed.

If He is not living, faith must dwindle and die. Do you think you can feed living faith on a dead Christ? You say, perhaps, living faith in God may now go on, even if we lost some faith in Christ. What! could living faith go on in a God who could let such an one as Christ die, who could disappoint the confident faith of Christ Himself that God would raise Him up to glorious life? How can you have living faith in such a God? Is He the Father if His most glorious, only begotten Son be dead? A poor and undivine Fatherhood! Not so very much mightier than our own if it has to see its best beloved perish and cannot help. If God did not raise Christ, but failed Him after such a faith, how can He be more than a perhaps to any faith of ours? No; living faith, even in God, is faith in a living Christ. It is only such faith that can escape extinction. If He be a living Christ, He is not simply an immortal soul. He is not one among many immortals, not even the first among His peers. It is for those nearest Him that He is most peerless. He is King of the whole realm of the soul, and it is He that keeps our faith alive.

If it be not so, if He is only kept alive by our faith, that faith itself must sink under such a task—the task of keeping Christ immortal. If He is not the living, reigning Christ, He is a Christ growing weaker as the ages move on and He recedes into the past. He becomes less and less a power for faith. As He grows more distant, faith in Him grows more dim. If He be not a living Christ, then every generation makes His influence more indirect. It is transmitted to us through more and more people, and as humanity increases He decreases. More souls are interposed

* Browning: *Apparent Failure*, Epilogue, Third Speaker.

between our souls and Him, and absorb His limited light. He becomes lost and smothered in His Church and its corruptions, like any Buddha. The world moves on and leaves Him behind, moves on and outgrows Him. He becomes chiefly a scholar's Christ. It may even become a hope and an effort with us that we should outgrow Him. Great as He was for His own age, if He be not the living and reigning Christ we may, and even must, hope to reach a point of spiritual perfection beyond His, a communion more intimate with the Father, because knowing more of His will. We may even hope one day to be in a position to do more for His principle than His opportunities allowed Him to do. And each age will flatter itself that it has done so, that it has left Him behind, outdone His work, and can search the soul as He did not. There are no few to be found to-day who would say, for instance, that dramatists like Shakespeare or Ibsen have a knowledge of the heart Christ never had or has.

Well, this is a frame of mind fatal at least to Christ's place as Redeemer. It may esteem Him as Benefactor, but it displaces Him as Redeemer. It clears the ground for a totally new religion. It clears the ground, but it empties the soul, disappoints it, crushes its hope. If Christ were no Redeemer, it would need more than another such Christ: only to utter the sob of disappointment and despair that must rise in passion from the human soul as it awakes to its centuries of illusion, feels its spiritual chagrin, and resigns its eternal hopes. What soul could utter on the true scale of his soul the universal woe, "We trusted it had been He who should have redeemed mankind"? For it is just a Redeemer that we most need from God, and a living Redeemer. It is not a teacher, a living example we need, not a benefactor, not an ideal.

Nay, I will go farther. It is not simply a redemption we need. If Christ had come to perform a certain work of redemption, and then had ceased to be; if He had come to satisfy a divine justice with a holy victim, and had then passed into nothingness after satisfying the conditions and leaving the way free for God's love to go forth; if He had come to perform certain preliminaries of our salvation, and not for ever to be our Salvation—then we should have had in Him neither the Redemption nor Salvation

that we need. We need a living Redeemer to take each one of us to God, to be for every one to-day all that He could have been upon earth to any one in that great yesterday, and to be for ever what He is to-day. We need a living Redeemer to plead for us in God, not against God, but against our accusing conscience, to be our Advocate with the Father against our self-condemnation. We need Him as the human conscience of God to come to our rescue against our conscience—and the more so as our conscience is quickened, socialised, exalted, and aggravated by solidarity with all the damnation of the world. Conscience makes us men and heroes. Yes, but it is conscience, too, that mocks our manhood with the memory of our sin, our neighbour's, and our kind's. If we were left alone with our conscience it would do more, on the whole, to overwhelm us than to redeem us or support us. We need some surety more sure and merciful and universal than our conscience. We need something more worthy than our natural moral manhood. We need to be made "more sure that we are Christ's than that we are men", more the servants of Christ's conscience than the heroes of our own, more penitents than stalwarts, more saints than ironsides. That is our need of a Redeemer, of a living human Redeemer, a moral owner and King, a living Christ, a Lord and Master more immortal than ourselves, and the root of all that makes our immortality other than a burden. We need a living Redeemer. We need Him for a living faith. And we need Him, as I have already said, *for a living God*—for the reality of a living God.

Yes, to lose the living Christ is to lose the living God, and so on to lose our human soul and future. Whatever enfeebles the hold of Christ on the world now relaxes its sense of God. To escape from Christ is only to be lost in the vague; it is not to ascend to God. It is faith in Christ that has kept belief in a God from dying out in the world. It is never the arguments of the thinkers or the intuitions of the saints that have done that. If Christ grow distant and dim, the sense of a living personal God, of Christ's God and Father, fades from the soul, and the power of God decays from life. And what happens then? We lose faith in man—in each other, and in ourselves. To lose the sense of God

is, in course of time, to lose faith even in our own selves, our confident, defiant selves. The soul that in its own strength defies God, dismisses Him from life, has taken the greatest step to losing faith in itself. How is that? It is thus. What I have said is, lose the living personal God, as in losing Christ you would lose Him, and you lose your own soul, your very self-confidence. And it is thus. Make your God not a living God, but a force, a blind, heartless power, or even an irresponsive idea, and you make Him something your heart and will can have no intercourse with. Will can only commune with will, heart with heart. Make your ideal of Humanity an abstraction, not a living soul like Christ's, and you reduce Humanity, as you would reduce God, to a mere ideal or a mere power. You make God and man at their highest something the heart cannot converse with. You rob them of personality. Yet they remain all the time powers greater than the simple soul. So that the great practical feature and experience of the soul, its personality, is something of inferior worth to the world and its powers. In its nature as living soul, personality falls below the Almighty power of the universe. But once let the human soul be sure of that and it is all over with it. It will soon lose power to stand up against such a universe, against the spectacle of nature, against the shocks of life. The universe will roll over it. It loses confidence in itself, because it lost faith in a living God. The soul is lost because it lost God, the living God; and it lost Him because it lost His revealed Humanity—the living Christ as its Mediator and Redeemer with Him for ever.

Mediator and Redeemer! must we not go farther even than that with an ever-living Christ? Yes, one step farther. Intercessor! Steward and Key-bearer of the spiritual world! "He ever liveth to make intercession for us." It is an ever-lasting Redemption, and therefore it is a ceaseless Intercession.

### THE INTERCESSION OF CHRIST

The intercession of Christ is simply the prolonged energy of His redeeming work. The soul of Atonement is prayer. The standing relation of Christ to God is prayer. The perpetual energy

of His Spirit is prayer. It is prayer (and *His* prayer) that releases for us the opportunities and the powers of the spiritual world. It is the intercession of Christ that is the moving force within all the spiritual evolution of history. It is the risen Redeemer that has the keys of the world unseen—the keys which admit it to history as well as open it to man. The key of the unseen is prayer. That is the energy of the will which opens both the soul to the kingdom and the kingdom to the soul. But never *our* prayer. It is a prayer *for* us, not *by* us.

It is Christ the Intercessor that has the key of the unseen—to deliver *from* death, to deliver *into* fulness of spiritual life. The Redeemer would be less than eternal if He were not Intercessor. The living Christ could not live and not redeem, not intercede. Redemption would be a mere act in time if it were not prolonged as the native and congenial energy of the Redeemer's soul in the Intercession of Eternity. Do not picture Christ the Intercessor as a kneeling figure beseeching God for us. It is God within God; God in self-communion; God's soliloquy on our behalf; His word to Himself, which is His deed for us. Rise to think of His intercession as the standing and inexhaustible energy of the divine soul as Redeemer, its native quality, divinity, and occupation through all the variety of the spiritual world for ever. The priestly atonement of Christ was final, but it was final in the sense of working incessantly, insuperably on, not in its echoes and results with us, but in the self-sustained energies of His own Almighty and immortal Spirit. This is the priesthood which is the end of priesthood, and its consummation the satisfaction of the priestly idea. The chief reason why we resent an ecclesiastical priesthood is not because it impairs our independence, but because it challenges the true, final, and sufficient priesthood and intercession of the Redeemer. It deadens the vitality for us of the living Christ. It darkens the glory of His Reconciliation, beclouds the spirit-world, seals up the soul by sealing the powers of death and the unseen, and taking out of the Saviour's hand the key that opens the spirit-world. The intercession of saints is only an attempt to pick the lock, and the sacrifice of the Mass only a forcing of the bolt which freely yields to the intercession of the Redeemer alone.

## III.—THE CHRIST PERSONAL TO US

Faith in Christ (as a last word) is faith in a Christ personal to us.

We must have the historic Christ and more. We must have the living Christ. But a living Christ who only ruled His kingdom in the unseen *by general laws* would be no sufficient Saviour. He must be personal to us. He must be our Saviour, in *our* situation, *our* needs, loves, shames, sins. He must not only live but mingle with *our* lives. He must charge Himself with *our* souls. We believe in the Holy Ghost. We have in Christ as the Spirit the Sanctifier of our single lives, the Reader of our hearts, the Helper of our most private straits, the Inspirer of our most deep and sacred confessions. We must have one to wring from us "*My* Lord and *my* God." We need not only the risen Christ, but the returned Christ; not only the historic Christ, nor the heavenly, but the spiritual, the intimate, the Husband of the soul in its daily vigour, its daily conflict, its daily fear, its daily joy, its daily sorrow, its daily faith, hope, love. We need, O how we need, a Lord and Master, a Lover and King of our single, inmost, shameful, precious souls, the Giver and Goal of our most personal salvation, a Conscience within our conscience, and a Heart amidst our heart and its ruins and its resurrection.

That is the Christ we need, and, thank God for His unspeakable gift, that is the Christ we have.

# CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

# CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

## I. THE SIN OF THE REGENERATE

"Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not. ... Whosoever is born of God cannot sin."—1 JOHN iii. 6, 9.

THIS is one of the hard sayings which are so fascinating in the Bible. It raises one of the problems that are so engaging to our moral thoughts, and one of the anomalies that are so irritating and depressing to our moral experience.

Statements like these texts seem to be met with every kind of contradiction:—

1. In the first place, there is the contradiction offered by John himself. 'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar.' We are to keep confessing, even as sons of God, which means that we keep sinning; for we cannot be urged to confess over and over sins we did before conversion, and which we had forgiven us as we entered on peace with God by faith. The children of God in John's own view keep sinning; yet here you have it, 'Whoso is born of God cannot sin.'

2. In the next place, there is the contradiction offered by our own experience. We know that we sin as surely as we know our life in Christ. As often as we confess Christ we have to confess Him as Saviour and as Eternal Saviour. We have to come as penitents. Our blessedness is always a salvation, not a mere donation. And we have new sins to confess since we last confessed His salvation and took His forgiveness. We cannot deny that we abide in Him; that would be to deny our faith altogether. But just as little can we deny our daily sin, that it is our fault if we are not more after His mind. If a Christian's sin mean his severance from Christ, then the more Christian we feel the more severed we must be; because the more Christian we are in

conscience the more sensitive we are to our sin, and therefore the less we must feel that we abide in Him and are born of Him, if this text have its face value.

And our own experience is only enlarged by what we know of the experience of greater saints than ourselves. The history of holiness is a record of self-abasements on daily cause. It is a story of triumph and joy, but it is a daily humiliation all the same, and a real, concrete humiliation; not a vague and sentimental self-accusation, but a definite self-indictment as the fruit of a serious self-examination.

3. Moreover, texts like these seem in contradiction with the very nature of faith itself. We are told sometimes that it is faithless on our part not to expect sinlessness in this life from the power of God's grace, deliverance entire not only from sin's guilt but from sin's power, not only from its power but even its presence. But it is just the other way. To say 'I have now no sin' is to give up that relation to God which is the essence of faith, and to stand upon a new and subtle kind of legalism. The man who says that tries to enter on a relation to God which is higher than faith, and therefore he falls out of faith. There is no higher relation possible. Love is but faith in its supreme and perfect form. It is the impassioned expression on the face of faith. There is but one attitude of conformity to the will of God, and that is faith: a faith that, being itself an act of will and obedience, always works outward into love. To go beyond that is to step outside the right relation to God. Faith is not the mere sense of dependence on God, but something much more definite, positive, and real. It is the sinner's trust in God the Redeemer. Once a sinner always a sinner—in this sense at least, that he who has but once sinned can never be as if he had never sinned. His very blessedness to all eternity is a different thing from the blessedness of the sinless. The man whose iniquity is not imputed is a very different being from the man whose iniquity was never committed. One sin is, in a sense, a sin in all. The whole nature is affected by it, and always. Pardon is not the cure of a passing illness, but a new birth in which the whole constitution is changed. It is not the dispersion of a cloud by the same sunny action as lights the ground. It was I who, at my will's centre, did

that thing. It was my will and self that was put into it. My act was not the freak of some point on my circumference. It came from my centre. It was my unitary, indivisible self that was involved and is infected. Faith is the attitude of that same self and will of me to God. And as it has become a sinful self through me or my race of me's, therefore for ever faith is not the faith of the sinless but of the redeemed, not of the holy but of the sanctified, the faith and the love of those who have been forgiven much, forgiven often and long, forgiven always. The very nature of faith is trust of a Saviour, who is not the saviour of my past but of my soul; and it is trust for forgiveness, for forgiveness not only of the old life but of the new. That life is only what it is by reason of grace; and grace is not simple benediction, but blessing as the fruit of incessant forgiveness. It is the same forgiving grace that sanctifies us sinners in heaven and has mercy upon us on earth.

It is a fatal mistake to think of holiness as a possession which we have distinct from our faith, and conferred upon it. That is a Catholic idea still saturating Protestant pietism, and making a ready soil for the virus of Rome and the plague of unethical sacraments. Faith is the very highest form of our dependence on God. We never outgrow it. We refine it, but we never transcend it. Whatever other fruits of the Spirit we show, they grow upon faith, and faith which is in its nature repentance. Penitence, faith, sanctification, always co-exist; they do not destroy and succeed each other; they are phases of the one process of God in the one soul. It is untrue to think of holiness or sinlessness as a possession, a quality, an experience of the soul, and so distinct from a previous and qualifying faith. There is no such separate experience. Every Christian experience is an experience of faith; that is, it is an experience of what we have not. Faith is always in opposition to seeing, possessing, experiencing. A faith wholly experimental has its perils. It varies too much with our subjectivity. It is not our experience of holiness that makes us believe in the Holy Ghost. It is a matter of faith that we are God's children; there is plenty of experience in us against it. That we are justified and reborn is matter of faith. The spirit we have is no possession of ours. It is God's Spirit, and it is ours by an act

of faith. To claim sinlessness as the perfect state superseding faith is to fall from faith, not to rise from it. It is because we have sin that we believe—as belief must go in a religion whose nature is for ever revealed as Redemption. Our perfection is not to rival the Perfect, but to trust Him. Our holiness is not a matter of imitation but of worship. Any sinlessness of ours is the adoration of His. The holiest have ever been so because they dared not feel they were. Their sanctity grew unconsciously from their worship of His. All saw it but themselves. The eye is the beauty of the face because it sees everything but itself; and if it betray self-consciousness the charm is dimmed. The height of sinlessness means the deepest sense of sin. If we ever came to any such stage as conscious sinlessness we should be placing ourselves alongside Christ, not at His feet. We should have 'life in ourselves', with Him but not through Him, or through Him only historically. We should pass out of faith into experience, or actual, personal possession like our common integrity. We should be self-sufficient. We should cease to live on a constant look to God in Christ, and repentance would cease. We should be near the fall that so often comes to the sinless. We should be in the moral peril of those who, feeling they have attained this sinlessness, are ready to call each impulse good and lawful, as born from the Spirit with which they are now possessed. Moral perceptions are confused. Evil is called good because it is deduced from the Spirit. 'Out of a state of holiness can come no sin. I may do what I am moved to do and it is not sin.'

All this is contrary to the true nature of faith in a Saviour and His righteousness as the standing essence of the Christian life.

4. Perfection is not sinlessness. The 'perfect' in the New Testament are certainly not the sinless. And God, though He wills that we be perfect, has not appointed sinlessness as His object with us in this world. His object is communion with us through faith. And sin must abide, even while it is being conquered, as an occasion for faith. Every defect of ours is a motive for faith. To cease to feel defect is to cease to trust. To cease to feel the root of sin would be to have one motive the less to cast us on God for keeping. Every need is there in order to rouse the need for God. And we need God chiefly, not as a means

to an end, not to satisfy earthly need, to keep the world going, to comfort us, or to help us to the higher moral levels. We do not need God chiefly as a means even to our own holiness. But we need God for Himself. He Himself is the end. We need chiefly communion with Him; which is not confined to the perfectly holy but is open to all in faith, and possible along with cleaving sin. To treat a living person as an end, to seek him for himself, has but one meaning. It is to love him, to have our desire and energy rest in him, to have our personal finality in him. So it is that we need and seek God, not His help nor His gifts—even of sanctity, but Himself. His great object with us is not our sinlessness but our communion. "Give me thy heart." He does not offer us communion to make us holy; He makes us holy for the sake of communion.

It has pleased God to leave us *in* our sin (though not *to* our sin) that we may be driven to seek more than His help, namely Himself. We do not receive a new will, a new nature, from God, and then go on of ourselves, having got all that He can give. We are compelled by our cleaving sin to press on into close and permanent communion. "My grace is thy sufficiency." It is not simply our ability, but our sufficiency. It is our perfection no less than our power. We end with it as we began. We end with the same forgiving grace as started us. The recipients of grace are much more than the servants of uprightness. The prodigal was more after God's heart than his brother. And the same would have been true had the brother been sinless by a far finer standard than he had, so long as it was sinless self-sufficiency, a self-contained sinlessness. The headlong sin is perhaps a safer thing than the sinless security. All life, it has been said, is the holding down of a dark, wild, elemental nature at our base, which is most useful, like steam, under due pressure. So with sin and its mastery by faith. The pressure from below drives us to God, and the communion with God by faith keeps it always below. The outward pressure of nature, and even of perverted nature, in man develops in him through God, a power which converts, controls, utilises, and exalts nature. It is doubtful if real holiness is quite possible to people who have no "nature" in them, no passion, no flavour of the good brown earth. Take

away that elemental rage from below and you make faith a blanched and inept thing. You have no more than quietist piety, passive religion, perfect in sound happy natures as an enjoyment, but very imperfect as a power. Faith, in the true sense, is all-sufficient,because it brings a rest which is itself power, force, will. It is the offspring of God's power and man's; it is not the mere occupation of man by God, which as often means suppression as inspiration.

5. There is another aspect of the collision between faith and the idea of sinlessness as it is often pursued. Sinlessness is a conception in its nature negative and individual. It has often been pointed out how for this reason it tends continually to an ascetic way of life and morals. Faith, on the other hand, is in its nature positive and social. Its spirit and destiny is love. Love, and not sinlessness, is the maturity of faith. There is an egoism about the sinless idea which stamps this order of piety as immature, remote, purist, and pre-occupied. Human fellowship is otiose to it. Men can be done with or without if only "souls" be won. There is a suspicion of want of heart. A man may put away many sins, and cultivate no small devotion, and yet be a loveless self-seeker and a spiritual *aiguille*. There are certain forms of self-edification which run out into self-absorption, and leave men, and especially women, working at goodness rather than at duty. This is a frequent result of the culture of sinlessness, and it is in its nature anti-social. It becomes indifferent to churches, and finally to the Church. It is inter-denominational, then undenominational, then it ends in a new sect which is not a church so much as a coterie, and lives upon piety more than on faith.

But God's end in Christ is a Church community, apart from which and its faith and love there is no effectual sonship. In the design of God what is sinless is primarily the Church and not the individual. It is the Church and not the individual that is the counterpart of Christ. If we are complete in Christ, we are complete only in a holy and Catholic Church. A Church of sanctified egoisms would be no Church. Its essence would not be faith but moral or spiritual achievement. If the Church in heaven be one with the Church on earth its sanctity co-exists with much sin. Its heavenly perfection is not sinlessness—"That they without

us should not be made perfect.' Nor is any fancied sinlessness to which a mortal may attain to be disjoined from the sin of his age and kind. There is more of it in him than he knows. The isolation that he fancies is impossible. And the General Confession misbecomes him no more than it does the poor publican whose mood leaps to its words.

There may be much sin tarrying in a man if there be but the love of God overriding it, and the love of man in God. Love is not a mere reduction of sin as an amount, but it is a life turned in a new way, tuned to a new key, vowed to a new Lord, and lived in a new spirit. The difference (as I have urged) is one of quality, not of quantity. And it is along that qualitative way that our perfection lies—in a heart that loves, and loves not many but much. It has the source of all its love in the faith to which much is forgiven; the source of its faith in the grace that forgives much; and the condition of its holiness in the fellowship of many whose sin is still a sorrow but a sorrow still. The holiness of Christ Himself was a holiness conditioned by the brotherhood of many sinners whom He was not ashamed to call brethren. And it is the holiness of One who is organically united with a Church in large part sinful still.

So much for the contradictions involved by the idea of mere sinlessness, especially for this life, as the form of perfection and holiness.

6. Where does the solution of these contradictions lie? We ought to find it in the same John who presents the problem. A real revelation, and a true apostle of revelation, push forward no problem whose solution they do not carry in the rear. The problem is but the deflection of the light as it enters our denser air.

John himself believes in two kinds of sin, and both of them are possible to the believer. "There is a sin unto death ... and there is a sin not unto death" (I John v. 16, 17). It was a distinction current in the Old Testament, and it explains much in the New, where it is deepened. The sin unto death is when a man falls entirely out of communion with God. He loses the life of God from his soul permanently—I do not say eternally. He has not Eternal Life *abiding* in him. The world conquers him. The habit of his mind becomes earthly; and if he has relapsed it is a

more inveterate worldliness that holds him, because his faithlessness makes his old faith seem a mockery. He is bitter because he is disillusioned. Sin becomes not an attack, an episode, or a lapse, but the principle of his life. I do not mean gross sin, necessarily, but the godless habit. It settles down on him and into him as frost penetrates the ground. He relapses, never to rise again. That is the sin unto death. And the sin not unto death is every transgression which still leaves the habit and sympathy of the soul for God a living thing. There are lapses which a man by vigilance, repentance, prayer, and well-doing can repair. Sin is a region he may visit, but it does not become his element. He falls into sin, but not into godlessness. The chill is thrown off. The frost does not go in upon him. The attack does not reach the heart. Every believer has more or less of this sin in him, and the risk of it always. But it does not cut him off from the divine life. There is a daily confession, a daily forgiveness, a daily cleansing of the channels of the grace of God.

Now the former, the sin unto death, is sin by pre-eminence. The man becomes identified with it. He loves sin, he does not love God. His life is one act of sin. And it is incompatible with the regenerate life of faith. Whoso is born of God sinneth not in this sense. No man so sinning abides in Christ. Whoso abides in Christ sinneth not this sin. He may commit sins, but he does not live sin like the man who has returned to be a worldling and practically renounced Christ. Sin does not become his world, his element. His sympathies and affinities, his effort and his service, are all to goodness and to God. His life on the whole and at the core is a life of faith and of growing mastery over the world.

7. But John seems to imply that once a man is born of God relapse is impossible: iii. 9, "He cannot sin, because he is born of God." Now, I admit with great reverence that for the modern Christian mind such language is too absolute. Had John written with an eye to modern ways of thinking he would have said something to show on the spot, as he does show elsewhere, that he did know the difference between the ideal and the actual, between a moral and a natural necessity, between a judgment of experience and a judgment of faith. If we reason from experience we do find that men born of God have fallen into sin, and have

sinned even unto death. Men remain free, with the perils of freedom, even as the subjects of divine grace. The compulsions of God are not natural necessities. The "cannot" here does not mean a natural impossibility as if we said, he cannot fly, cannot fall from the earth's surface, if he is born on the earth. There is no such necessity as if, when a man is born of God, all the rest followed of itself by inevitable sequence and a causative chain. It is not as if sinlessness then worked itself out in us without effort. To be born of God means to pass into fellowship with a living will; that is to say, it is to develop into a greater intensity of living will, to be more than ever a doer, a free doer, if we are like God, and a doer of righteousness, of holiness. "Cannot sin" means not that he is not able to sin, but that his principle will not allow him to sin. As the regenerate personality he cannot do it. He may, of course, be at the same time something other than the regenerate personality in his actual condition so far. But in so far as he is the servant of that personality he cannot. "You cannot do it," we say to a man, not denying the physical possibility, as if he were paralyzed or in jail, but denying the moral possibility. "You cannot, consistently with your principles do it; you cannot, with your nature, with all I have known of you, do it; it would not be you if you did it; you simply cannot." Ideally, whoso is born of God cannot sin. That is the *absolute* truth. That is a judgment of faith as distinct from a judgment of experience. It arises from what we know of God, of Christ, not of human life. These texts of John's are all judgments of faith, formed from his knowledge of the absolute holiness and power of Christ. He has forgotten for the moment the actuality of man. He is possessed with the sense of the omnipotence of Christ. That will be *finally* as actual as it is now ideal. It is the ultimate reality. It is the surest thing in existence. John was speaking from the interior of Christ, possessed by the faith of His moral omnipotence. The words were not written by a man who had attained sinlessness, or watched it in others, and then worked out its implications backward to Christ. They came from one who by faith and not experience had grasped this nature, power, and place of Christ. Experience works up from nature to infer God's power and glory; from human love to infer a divine tenderness and

fatherhood; from personal history to implications about Christ and God. And that is the method of a subjective, literary, and humanist age like the present. But faith works downward from its grasp of God in Christ alone, from its absolute and eternal certainties, to actual life. And it works not merely with an inference but with an ought; not with implications but with compulsions; with demands absolute in order to be final and effective; not upon thought or truth, but on conduct. Faith does not induce from life what God must be, but it deduces from God what life must be. It does not predicate about God; it prophesies about man. The experimental religion of true faith is not based on experience, but on revelation and faith. It is *realised* by experience, it proceeds in experience; but it does not proceed *from* experience. Experience is its organ, but not its measure, not its principle. What we experience we possess, but faith is our relation not to what we possess, but to what possesses us. Our faith is not in our experience, but in our Saviour. It is not in our experience of our Christianity, but in a Christ Who, while we are yet without experimental strength, both dies and lives for us. John concludes from Christ to man as the normal man in Christ should be, as Christ alone is. It is not a logical but a Christological judgment. To abide in Christ certainly would be to escape sin. It would not be to acquire sanctity as a recompense for faith, but it would be to perfect that life of faith which is the only sanctity. He who sins does so because he hath not seen Christ or known Him, has not seen into Him and understood Him. He has perhaps been thinking of his own sin, and arguing up from that experience that he must be out of Christ, instead of dwelling on the Redeemer and working down with a spirit-compulsion on his own sin. He has not grasped Christ's spiritual omnipotence in temptation, has not gone in upon Christ, but merely hung on Christ. To hang upon Christ, and to do no more than hang, is to be a drag on Christ and a strain on man. To see and know Him is to enter and live in Him, to walk, run, mount, by the communion of His life. The fall of many who once were Christ's is because they took no serious means with themselves to prosecute their life in Him, but were dragged in His wake till they got tired of the strain. There are men to-day who once tasted Christ,

but their serious will was not given to their Christian life but to their affairs. And so the world, having monopolised their *will*, submerged their soul. And to be dragged after Christ, submerged in a medium so dense as the world, means a friction and a strain so severe that they took their fatal relief by cutting the cord—and drifting.

8. I wish to lay much stress on the vital difference between the saint's sin and the sinner's sin, as these texts carry it home to us. It has a vital bearing on the question of a sinful and a sinless perfection, the perfection which is faith, and the perfection which has outgrown faith and become only rarefied character or conduct. Any perfection which does that has become another than Christian perfection, and in leaving faith behind has fallen from faith.

The difference between the Christian and the world is not that the world sins and the Christian does not. It suits the world to think that it is; because it offers a handy whip to scourge the Church's consistency while resenting its demands. But such a distinction is no part of the Church's claim. Nor does it mark off the Christian's worldly years from his life in Christ. A difference of that kind is merely in quantity—all the sin on the one side, none of it on the other. But the real difference (I must say often) is not in quantity; it is in quality. It is not in the number of sins, but in the attitude toward sin and the things called sin. It is in the man's sympathies, his affinities; it is in his conscience, his verdict on sin, his treatment of it—whether the world's or his own. The world sins and does not trouble; it even delights in it. In sin it is not out of its element; it may even be in its element and most at home there. The fear and hate of sin is not in the least its temper. But with the Christian man there is a new spirit, a new taste, bias, conscience, terror, and affection. His leading attitude to sin is fear and hate. His interest, his passion, is all for good and God. He himself is different from himself. He is renewed in the spirit of his mind. He may indeed lapse. The old instinct, the old habit, breaks out, and surprises him off his guard. The old vice fastens on him in a season of weakness. The old indifference may creep back. Mere nervous exhaustion may make him feel for a long time as if the spirit had

been taken from him. But these are either interludes, or they are upon the outskirts of his real nature. The loyalty of his person is still true, and his course in the main is right, whatever deviations the storms may cause, or however the calms may detain and irritate him. What is the thing most deep and assertive in him? I mean, what is most continuous in him? I do not ask what asserts itself *oftenest*, but what asserts itself most persistently on the whole, and in the end most powerfully and effectively. What is the real and only *continuity* of his life? Is it a sinful temper and bias, a sinful joy or indifference, broken only occasionally, and ever more rarely, by spasms of goodness, glimpses of holiness, freaks of mercy and truth? Or is it the sympathy and purpose of holiness, clouded at times by drifts of evil, and cleft, to his grief, by flashes of revolt? That is the question. And it is the way the question will be put at the last. It will not be, How many are your sins and how many your sacrifices? but, On which side have you stood and striven, under which King have you served or died? A man may abide in the many-mansioned, myriad-minded Christ, even if the robber sometimes break into his room, or if he go out and lose his way in a fog. You stay in a house, or in a town, which all the same you occasionally leave for good or for ill. The question is, What is your home to which your heart returns, either in repentance or in joy? Where is your heart? What is the bent of your will on the whole, the direction and service of your total life? It is not a question settled in a quantitative way by inquiry as to the occupation of every moment. God judges by totals, by unities not units, by wholes and souls, not sections. What is the dominant and advancing spirit of your life, the total allegiance of your person? Beethoven was not troubled when a performer struck a wrong note, but he was angry when he failed with the spirit and idea of the piece. So with the Great Judge and Artist of life. He is not a schoolmaster, but a critic; and a critic of the great sort, who works by sympathy, insight, large ranges, and results on the whole. Perfection is not sinlessness, but the loyalty of the soul by faith to Christ when all is said and done. The final judgment is not whether we have at every moment stood, but whether having done all we stand—stand at the end, stand as a whole.

Perfection is wholeness. In our perfection there is a permanent element of repentance. The final symphony of praise has a deep bass of penitence. God may forgive us, but we do not forgive ourselves. It is always a Saviour, and not merely an Ideal, that we confess. Repentance belongs to our abiding in Christ, and so to any true holiness.

We may be essentially parted from our sin while yet it hangs about us. The constitution is renewed, but the disease recurs in abating force. The new nature asserts itself over the head of reactions. We lust for the fleshpots of Egypt, and we return upon our tracks and move in a circle; but it is, after all, but a loop upon our larger line of onward march. The enemy is beaten, though he makes guerilla raids and carries off something we deplore. Our progress is a series of victories over receding attacks which sometimes inflict loss. And the issue turns on the whole campaign, not on a few lost battles. We sin, but we are not of sin. We are its master, though at times the convict seizes the warder and gets him down. But it does not *reign* in us. It is not our life-principle, though it may get expression in our life. We sin, but not unto death. We still have and still use the Advocate with the Father. Against our sin we plant ourselves on God's side. There is that strange power in us to be two yet one, to be a seventh of Romans, to face ourselves, yea to face a divided self, as if we were three in one, and to say No with the total man to a sin which extorts a partial or occasional Yes. Every act of faith is saying No to a sin which says Yes in us. And sometimes the Yes drowns the No, while on the whole the life in faith says Yes to God. We lose on items, but we gain on the whole account. We are free from sin before we are rid of it, and of *all* its effects we are never rid. To all eternity we are what our sin has made us, by God's grace to it either as taken or refused. At our eternal best we are what redemption has made us, and not sanctification alone. We enter heaven by a decisive change, and not merely by a progressive purification. And this is the very marrow of Protestant divinity and Evangelical faith.

9. I should not like to be thought to mean that if the regenerate sin, it is not really they who sin but the flesh in them, the old man still surviving but not affecting their will. If the will

were not affected the struggle would not be so severe, nor the tragedy of the conflict so intense. The passion and pity of Romans vii. would not be the classic and searching thing it is and always has been if it were only a will at war with a tendency. It is two wills at war. It is at least a divided will. "It is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me" cannot mean that the will is wholly on the right side, but that in some slumber of it the dark unholy element wakes to seize the helm and give the course. That would be sad and mad, but not so bad as the awful situation whose despair calls for the redeeming intervention of the Son of God. The sin dwelling in the man is a sinful will, sinful volitions. It is not as if he *had* sin, but did not *do* sin. Sin is essentially an act of the will. And our acts cannot be severed from our central will in the way that these extenuations suppose. There is nothing in a man deeper than his source of action. There is no central something which can be the subject of sinlessness, a holy *Ding an sich*, while the casing of it is spotted with transgression which is not fatal because it is peripheral. Such psychology is mediæval, Catholic, and outgrown. There is nothing at the core which is unaffected by the act of sin. When sin is done, it is the man that sins. In each act which is not a mere occurrence it is the personality that is involved. Anything done in us, to us, or through us, is not an act, and is not sin, however damnable the sin is that may be the source of it outside us. There comes to my mind Shelley's *Cenci* and its preface.

In the sinful act it is the personality that is involved at its centre, but it need not be involved in a fatal and final way. It is very rarely that any single act embodies and exhausts the *entire* personality. That were the sin unto death, or else the divine act that as decisively redeems. And in either case the act is the compendium of a whole series of acts, which expresses the character of the personality. Acts may be done by the will, good or evil, which involve the personality from its centre, and affect it, but do not seal and decide it for ever. Thus will may sin, but the personality, the *series* of volitions, the ruling habit and character of the will, is not given up to evil, and has not chosen it as its good. There may be sinful volitions in us, and yet the sinful principle does not really own us, but the good. "It is no

more I that do it" does not mean that it is not his will; for it is. But it does mean that it is not his total, ruling, and distinctive personality that does it. Sin captures certain volitions, but not the whole personality that exerts the volition. The sin comes from the centre, but it has not its home in the centre. Each sin comes from the central will, but not from the focus of the personality. It is a case of two sets of volitions, one of which is a chain, and the other a mere series. The evil volitions do not cohere in habit and affection. The man may put his whole force at any mad moment into a simple volition, but not his whole personality. *As* the new and regenerate personality he does not sin; and he cannot, in this sense, till the frequency of the sinful volitions, and their neglect, forge them into a chain, and bind the personality under them. It is not sin in the final sense till the sinful volitions are multiplied and spread through his personality, giving it its habit and affection, and dyeing it to the colour of evil. Passion becomes vice, and vice becomes his element.

10. The coherent and continuous line in our Christian life is the line of faith. The sins make a certain series, but broken, scattered, irregular. They emerge, but they do not make the continuity. They may bend the continuous line, or bury it, but they do not break it. They are foreign to us and not germane. What is germane is Christ and faith. Our prevailing habit of soul and bent of will is Christ's. And our falling out may even be (by His grace and our serious treatment of it) but the renewal of love. The fellowship is interrupted, but the base of the character is unchanged. The soul is not subverted. A cable still connects the two shores—Christ's and ours. If it break at a place it can be mended by pains, and connection restored. But the habit of sin, the worldly mind, takes the cable away. While it is there, defect is not destruction. "A sectary," says the Apostle to Titus, "after the first and second warning reject, knowing that he is subverted and sinneth, being judged by himself." There was no subversion, no sin unto death, in his sinful acts, till, in the face of light and warning, they became inveterate, a second nature, the ruling, perverse, crusted habit of his life. It is not sins that damn, but the sin into which sins settle down. Good and evil co-exist in the believer as in the redeemed world. But they co-exist

in a very different way; the currents set differently; the proportions are different; and it makes all the difference whether they are at the centre or the circumference of the soul, whether they are in its citadel or its suburbs. There is sin as the principle of a soul and sin as an incident, sin which stays and sin which visits. Visitations of sin may cleave indefinitely to the new life, and the freedom to sin and the risk are always there. The great justification does not dispense with the daily forgiveness. There is the great forgiveness once for all, when the man passes from death to life, to a new relation with God; and there is the daily forgiveness which renews it in detail and keeps the channel of grace clean, once it has been cut, and prevents it from silting up. There is the great forgiveness from sin which we ask in Christ's name alone, and there is its detail in the daily forgiveness which depends also on our forgiving daily. There is the bathing of the whole man into the regeneration in which he is born of God, and there is the washing, which is the cleansing of the feet daily exposed and daily soiled. There is all the difference between the pardoned sinner and the pardoned saint, between the step out of the world and the steps up to God. We have to work out into practice what we are in principle, to become what we are and are not, to fight sins because we are freed from sin. And failures in practice, however dangerous, are not the same as the great failure to place ourselves on the side of righteousness and holiness all our days.

It is easy to see the moral value of these great spiritual truths, the greatness, amplitude, magnanimity, freedom, they lend to life. It is always thus with the great spiritual realities. Apart from their direct and conscious power over us, they have an indirect power in us which we but partly know. We acquire their habit. We take life nobly. We escape from moral or mental scrupulism. We teach mere accuracy its true place, and we rescue veracity from the pedagogue for the seer, from Fröbel for Carlyle. We rise above the bondage of the small moralities and punctilios of life, to a noble carelessness which is the truest duty to details and the condition of doing them justice, and no more (which would be less). We walk in the spirit, and escape the importunities of the flesh. It is only so that we are fair to both flesh and spirit. To

treat life as a whole is the only justice to the parts of life. And this wholeness of vision, this totality of soul, it is not given even to Art to create, but to Jesus Christ. There have been certainly more magnanimous and patient Christians, in proportion, than artists. To see life most steadily and whole is, after all, the gift of Christ, as it was the power of Christ. He saw the soul from its centre and from its height. And the bane and travail of the world-soul was His, and only His, in the most real and effective sense. The true, sound, and steady view of life does not belong to man's criticism of life, even when the phrase means poetry; it belongs to the judgment of God, Who judges the world in Christ. He judges best who judges last. It is the final judgment that is the soundest. And that is the judgment of Christ, and of those whose moral and spiritual discrimination are cultivated with Him. Thus we are at once saved and judged. Salvation is quite as much judgment as privilege. And being judged, we sit secure upon the world. There is no fear or favour to deflect our own judgment. We are united with Him Who is Himself the final, and therefore faultless, Judge. Know ye not that the saints shall judge the world? The final sanity is complete sanctity. And the Holiest is the Key to the whole.

## II

## SANCTITY AND FAITH

"Every man *perfect* in Christ Jesus."—Col. i. 28.
"Complete in Him."—Col. ii. 10.

Christianity is the perfect religion because it is the religion of perfection. It holds up a perfect ideal, it calls us *incessantly* to this ideal, and it calls *all* to this ideal. *Each* man is called, and each man is *always* called, to it. It is a religion that issues from the perfect One, and returns to His perfection. But it returns through a far country and a dread. It returns by way of Redemption, so that the means of reaching this perfection for us sinners is not achievement but faith.

Christianity is not the perfect religion in the sense of being revealed as a finished, rounded, symmetrical whole. It is not

perfect in the sense of a closed circle, or a plastic form, which can be altered in nothing without being spoiled. It is not a perfection of proportion, of harmony, of symmetry. That is the Greek, pagan idea of perfection; whereas in Christianity we enter the perfect life maimed. The pagan idea of perfection is balance, or harmony of parts with each other. It is self-contained and self-poised. The Christian idea is faith, or harmony of relations with the will and grace of God. It is self-devoted, complete in Him; the perfection not of finish but of faith. It is perfect, not because it presents us with perfection, but because it puts us in a perfect attitude to perfection. Our perfection is not some integrity which we *possess*, in the sense in which the Vatican possesses the faultless Venus, or Christ's infallible Vicar. The one is as pagan in its idea of perfection as the other. It is the æsthetic idea of mere consistency, flawlessness, symmetry of thought and order, external, palpable, and unspiritual. But Christian perfection is something which we are put in the perfect way to *realize*, in the sense that we realize a living, moving ideal of character and life. It is not something with which we are presented; it is not even something we are to *believe*; but it is something into which we are *redeemed*. The perfection of Christianity is not even in the *ideal* of perfection it offers, but in the *power* of perfection it implants; not in its ideal of a Son of God, but in the power it gives, with *the* Son of God, to become sons of God by believing in His name.

Moreover, the perfection of God in Christ is not only a universal demand, but an instant; it is something which we can and must enter on in this life. We cannot exhaust it in this or any life, but we can and must be among the perfect in this life. "Be ye perfect" does not mean, Aim at a perfection in eternity, many lives and cycles away: the idea of cycles of development however true, is foreign to the New Testament. It means, Enter here and now on the perfection of God.

There are two notions of perfection which are wrong, and a third which is right. But all three are right compared with the notion that we are to wait for perfection till some indefinite time in the infinite future. All three urge that Christian perfection is a condition of actual, living people in this world. It is a religion, a faith; it is not merely a hope.

The first idea is Pietist; the second is Popish; the third is Protestant, Apostolic, Christian.

1. The Pietist idea pursues perfection as mere quietist sinlessness with a tendency to ecstasy. Its advocates are people sometimes of great grace and beauty; but it represents a one-sided, narrow, and negative spirituality. Its religion is largely emotional, mystical, and introspective. Its adherents are apt to be the victims of visions and moods. They seek perfection in a state of sinlessness. It is a condition largely subjective, ascetic, anæmic, feminine. It prescribes an *arbitrary* withdrawal from the interests, pursuits, and passions of life. It is a cloistered virtue. It is *distrait*, not actual. There is an absence of true humility. In its stead there may be either a laboured counterfeit, as painfully sincere as it is unsimple; or there is a precise self-righteousness which cannot veil a quiet air of superiority. It is certain that the perfect man will be the last to know how perfect he is. It is not a thing that can be worked at. For essential to all perfection is humility, and it is too humble to know how humble it is. In its choicer forms this pietism is devoted to love and prayer; but it seldom escapes the tinge of self-consciousness in their culture. In too many cases the prayer is superficial, mindless, without searching insight or passionate worship; while its love is limited, placid, and pale. Its holiness is to the great and classic sainthood, whether Roman or Protestant, as the drawing-room song is to music.

Moreover, this perfectionism is too individualist to feel how the single soul is tainted with the sin of its kind, and its possible achievement lamed by the slow progress of the race. The kind of perfection it aims at is made impossible by the ties that bind us to the part of mankind which is still unregenerate. And with all its introspection, it is too unpsychological to realise how the traces of sin live on in the sin-tainted will. Its self-examination is too mindless, too little mordant, for the individual, as it is too individual for the race. It knows of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, but its moral imagination is too poor to *realize* it. And there are some advocates of this sinless perfection who are offensive not only to the world, but also to the best of the Church. Their dulness of moral perception, commonness of fibre, and poverty of ideal breed a self-satisfaction which is little removed from

Pharisaism. And for public life they are of little worth. They may belong to the National Church, but for want of spiritual freedom they show little interest in the crucial issues of national Christianity. Their treatment of Scripture is accordingly childish. But they abound in devoted philanthropy. They have done much to quicken missionary zeal. And it is a service to insist on the idea of perfection as a present demand and an unworldly call. Their chief error is the identification of perfection with sinlessness. It is not the will of God that in this life we should be sinless, lest we should find a perfection apart from forgiveness.

2. The Popish idea of perfection has much in common with the Pietist. It is unworldly in the negative sense; it flees from the world, it does not master it. It is embodied in the monk and the nun. In the Roman system the monk is the ideal man, the nun the ideal woman. These stand on the summit of moral and spiritual greatness. They are likest Christ. They obey Christ most perfectly. Well, you have Gospels in your hands. You have what Rome has—the Bible and the Holy Ghost. Do you find it so? Was Christ the Divine Monk? Did He recommend the cloister? Were His chief commands poverty, celibacy, and obedience to ecclesiastical superiors? To Rome the last of these is the greatest. Never forget that perversion. Was it so with Christ, with Paul?

The whole Roman system rests on the double morality involved in this distinction. It is a religion by double entry. It teaches that only some are called to perfection, while for the majority the demands made are much more ordinary. Rome succeeds, like certain governments, by lowering the educational standard for the masses, by not being too hard on the natural man. But it canonises a starved and non-natural man, on whom it is very exacting. It compounds for its laxity with its adherents by its severity with its devotees. There are *precepts*, it says, which all must obey, and there are *counsels* which are only for those few destined to perfection. There are the commandments of the moral law for all, and there are the counsels distinctive of the Gospel, like loving your enemies, or voluntary poverty, which are not commanded, but only advised for those who are set on perfection. The Roman Church reckons twelve of these. There are thus two grades of morality, two classes of men, two moral

standards set up inside Christianity and inside the race. All are not alike before God. And all are not called to perfection in Jesus Christ; only a minority, only an aristocracy of Christians are. It is not said that only a minority attain, you will note; nor that those who respond to Christ are the true aristocracy of life amid a common world; but that only a minority of believers are *called* or intended by God for perfection in Christ. And these are not active but contemplative people, monks and nuns. *They* are the ideal Christian men and women. Whereas perfection in Christ is the essential call and badge of all Christians, and must be defined in harmony with that principle.

If the history of the monastic orders do not effectively destroy for us that idea of perfection, we must plunge, with Luther, into the principle and gospel of the New Testament again. I am not saying that human nature rises up against that kind of manhood. That would not be fatal. For there are choice forms of Christian manhood, such as I Corinthians xiii., which are not very welcome to mere human nature, and not in its power. If I hear a mere lusty athlete, a lazy libertine, or a keen worldling laughing at monks and nuns, my Christian sympathies for the occasion go to the cloister. I become for the hour a pervert to Rome. Mere natural manhood is not the criterion of such things. The Cross is against human nature. But what does rise up against that kind of perfection is the spirit and principle of the Gospel, the faith and freedom that broke forth from the Cross, first in St Paul, and then in the Reformation, which is our great Christian legacy and trust. These Pietist and Papist ideas of perfection are Catholic more than Evangelical, and thus are destroyed by the vital, free, final, sufficient, and perfect principle of Christian *faith*.* The true perfection is the perfection which is of God in *faith*. The perfect obedience is not the obedience which is *associated with* faith or from it, but the obedience of the soul which *is* faith, and which is the saving power and perfection for all. To be perfect is to be in Christ Jesus by faith. It is the right relation to God in Christ, not the complete achievement of Christian character.

3. The Protestant idea of perfection is the possession of the

* It is remarkable how Rome has been fed by a debased Evangelicalism. The early life of Newman is but one case of many.

righteousness of God. And the righteousness of God, in the New Testament idea, is something which is a gift of God to us, and no achievement of ours before Him. It is a justification of us, a righting of us, effected by Him, and on our side appropriated by the obedience not of conduct but of faith. On the human side, indeed, it *is* faith, which is held by God to be our righteousness, our true adjustment to the ultimate moral reality, which is Christ. In faith we are in the right and perfect relation to God. But God's justification of us is a perfect and complete thing. In faith, therefore, we possess the perfect will of God concerning us. We enter on a full salvation. We have as ours the fulness of Christ. The Roman theology knows only of a perfection, a righteousness, which is an acquisition, which is always growing and never there, which is not complete in the act of union by living faith, but must always be eked out by the sacraments and the obedience of the Church. There is, indeed, a true sense in which the perfection even of faith grows. It becomes actual in life and practice; but that adds nothing to the perfection which is ours in the incredible salvation which we take home by supernatural faith. Faith is implicit; what is explicit is experience. We but unfold a perfection which is in God's sight *there*, we do not accumulate a perfection which we are always striving to place there. The queen and mother of all the virtues is not our subjection and obedience to the Church. Implicit faith in anything institutional is usurped faith. The true faith is implicit in Christ, in Whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Faith is in its nature obedience, but it is the will's obedience to Christ. This is the root and mother of virtue; this is the new life with the promise and potency in it of all the perfection which may become actual in us by any sanctification. Our sanctification only unfolds in actual life the ideal perfection in which we really stand by faith in Christ. And yet this ideal perfection, being of pure and free grace, is not the vision foreseen by God of our moral effort's final success. But it is the finished and foregone gift of God in Christ through our faith, and the thing which alone promises the final success of any moral efforts. In giving Christ He gave us all things—*i.e.* perfection. It is not our moral success that is presented as perfection to God even in anticipation;

it is God's present to us of perfection that makes moral success possible. And this is the whole issue in the Roman controversy which the public on its cycles, newspapers, and political campaigns vainly thinks it has outgrown. The public thinks, but its soul does not. And so it thinks to little forward purpose and to little ultimate success. And it does not discern the most grave dangers to its own security and peace; which serious thought spiritually discerns in subtle and inchoate stages that need generations to work out their evil doom.

I cannot stop to trace how these popish ideas came in to distort the Gospel, how they rose in part from the old Stoic paganism and its mortifications. It could be shown you how Plato and Aristotle had much more to do with them than St Paul. Almost everything wrong in Romanism is a case of pagan malaria, which crept in on the pure gospel of the New Testament, and which is so hard to get out of the Christian system. The sacerdotalism of Rome, for instance, is much more pagan than Jewish in its origin and nature. So is the connection of Church and State. But I do ask leave to point out the root error that underlies these perversions, and a good many more, at this hour. Because I am not waging a polemic against Romanists; but as preaching to Protestants exposed to the like paganism to-day, I wish to point out how these wrong practices rise out of pagan errors which many Protestants share, and especially out of a supreme belief in the natural man and his morality as the Christian ideal. As soon as you part with the idea that our perfection is in our faith and not in our conduct, you have taken the train for Rome; and I urge you to get out at the first stop and go back to another platform.

The error at the root of all false ideas of perfection is this: it is rating our behaviour *before* God higher than our relation *to* God—putting conduct before faith, deeds before trust, work befor worship. That is the root of all pharisaism, Romanism, paganism, and natural and worldly morality. It is the same tendency at bottom which puts the sacraments above simple faith, which neglects the worship of the sanctuary for work in a mission, or replaces the gospel by ethical culture. "I do not care about a man's belief," you say; "show me what he does." Do you mean that? Now, I care comparatively little about what you

do, but I care infinitely about whom you believe in. I know if you believe in Christ your conduct will be seen to; but I have no guarantee that if you behave well you will believe in Christ. You may only admire Him as the greatest success in your own moral line, a master in your own art, the victor in a conflict, which after all you regard as the same for Him and for you. And all that is something different in kind from trusting Him as your Redeemer through victory in a conflict different in its purpose from yours or all men's. Our Redeemer is not simply a master in a region where we are all amateurs, as a great painter is the idol of his craft. But do you quite mean what you were saying? Do you mean that, if a man is good to the poor and kind to his family, honest in business, and active in humane politics, it is no matter what he thinks about Christ, whether he has to do with Him at all, or how he stands to the Cross? Do examine these phrases which make a flattering appeal to common sense. I suspect every creed which in the name of religion appeals to common sense. Do you really mean that a man's relation to God and to Christ is of little moment so long as he is self-denying, generous, public-spirited? If you do, you are popish and pagan in principle. And if a majority were of your way of thinking, we should have the Roman Church re-established in this country in a few generations. We should have the ethical soil for it. It is because that way of thinking and speaking is so common among Protestants, in the spirit of the age, that Romish principles have got so far with us as they have. It is because Christianity becomes identified with behaviour, with man's treatment of man, with humanism, philanthropy, humanity, with kindness and pity instead of *grace*. Humanity! Why, as Ibsen says, God was not humane to His own Son. We are not saved by the love we exercise, but by the Love we trust. The whole Protestant issue lies in that; and it is surrendered by none more than by the philanthropic liberals in popular theology. Their sympathies have taken the reins from their principles into their spiritual logic. They have never *approfondi leur sentiment*. We have no phrase for that admirable expression more elegant than that they have never sounded their own sentiments, or realized their practical sequel on a long historic scale. If the perfection of a Christian man is in

the morals or the mercy he exhibits and not in the Grace he trusts, if it is doing first and believing second, then the Romish form of Christianity is the sole and inevitable. It does not matter whether the doing is moral or ceremonial, behaviour or ritual.

The apotheosis of conduct has become a popular cult through the teaching of Matthew Arnold, so congenial to the British philistine and the semi-Roman Englishman. It is surely more accurate to call British philistinism Arnold's ally rather than his enemy when we remember that the Philistine was not the enemy of an Israel of ideas, as he said, but of an Israel of faith. It is Arnold's despised Non-conformity that represents the prophetic element in religion, which was the soul of the chosen people and the butt of Philistine mockery. And one may call the average Englishman semi-Roman, not only because in temperament he is the Roman of the modern world, but because, ecclesiastically, his moral culture and type have been so largely moulded by the half-reformed Church which he still tolerates, and which he prizes more as an organization of energy and society than of faith. It is a premiated institution of law and works. Well, for Arnold religion was a branch of culture. It was ethical culture, aided by the spiritual imagination. And the Church was to be supported, even by the agnostic, as the great society for the promotion of goodness or conduct, which he memorably defined as "three-fourths of life". Like most worship of culture and of the orderly æsthetic idea of perfection, Arnold's work makes ultimately for Rome. Rome is the refuge from his intellectual doubt. Rome is the home of his imaginative religion. Rome realizes his idolatry of good form. And Rome is the soil congenial to his ethical nomism, his moral ritual, his religion of morality inged with emotion, of flushed conduct and blanched belief. All agnostic culture leads to clericalism by lay indifference, and then to Rome by desperation. It does not lead to atheism, because the feminine side of human nature will not endure that; it prefers large and definite error to narrow vague truth, positive peril to negative ruin.

But Christian perfection is not a perfection of culture. It is not a thing of ideas or of finish. Such perfection is for the select few, for a natural elect. It is the perfection of the *élite*. This is so even with ethical culture. Its fine programme is yet no gospel.

The soul's true and universal perfection is of faith. It is a perfection of attitude rather than of achievement, of relation more than of realization, of trust more than of behaviour. Conduct may occupy three-fourths of our time, but it is not three-fourths of life. To say that it is, is to return from the qualitative to the quantitative way of thinking, from which culture was expected to deliver us. The greatest element in life is not what occupies most of its time, else sleep would stand high in the scale. Nor is it even what engrosses most of its thought, else money would be very high. It is what exerts intrinsically the most power over life. The two or three hours of worship and preaching weekly has perhaps been the greatest single influence on English life. Half an hour of prayer, morning or evening, every day, may be a greater element in shaping our course than all our conduct and all our thought; for it guides them both. And a touch or a blow which falls on the heart in a moment may affect the whole of life in a way that no amount of business or of design can do. Conduct is not the main thing. To say that it is, is but the pardonable extravagance which gives force to a necessary protest. Look to the faith and the conduct must come. True faith has all ideal conduct in its heart and, what is more, in its power. And it is the only thing that has it. Yea, the main thing is not conduct; and it is not even character. Action may shape character. But what shapes action? And it is not action alone that shapes character. It is something more akin to faith that shapes both. There are forms of Christianity which preach character—character, as if that were the saving thing, the thing to work at, as if it were healthy to work at it. It is no more the saving thing than conduct. It is not the soul's perfect state. It is a thing of greatest moment, but it is the fruit of salvation, the expression of our perfection, not its condition. It is the result of being accepted by God; it is not what makes us acceptable. A person of no character may by faith be more acceptable to God than one whose soulless character is in universal esteem. Else what is the meaning of the penitent thief, of publicans and harlots going into the kingdom of heaven before decent Pharisees? Do you think that Pharisees there meant only the rascals of the party, the quacks, the impostors, the conscious hypocrites and pious frauds? Did it need

the moral insight and the spiritual authority of Jesus to tell us that a penitent outcast was preferred before these? No. Anybody could see that. He meant that the reprobate, in his act of faith, with his character not only lost but ruined and all to be built up again—that that reprobate was, in the passion of his penitence and trust, inside the kingdom of heaven; while the reputable Pharisee, the esteemed and estimable member of the national party and the national church, whose uprightness and respectability had been such as never to rouse the need of repentance, was without. Yea, the hard, placid matron whose family was well brought up and floated out, who was a patron of society, a sponsor for all new-comers, a chaperon with whom you could go anywhere, she was outside the Kingdom; and poor Magdalene, poor Gretchen, the poor slayer of her unwelcome child, might be in. If that was not Christ's view, what does the story of the prodigal and his brother mean? The prodigal had no character at all; and his brother's character was fit to be held up to all the young farmers of the country-side. But the prodigal had faith and repentance. And in these he had a perfection before God denied to ninety-and-nine too admirable to need repentance. It is not a question of the sinless being postponed to the sinful and repentant. It is not a case of premium on sin and evil-doing that good may come. It is a case of a sinful race, whose one true attitude to God is penitence, and which is more worthily represented in God's sight by the repentant prodigal than by the lives (so charming to our social and friendly associations) to which personal sin seems as strange as the sting of it is unknown. I am not impugning social position, or our personal affinities, affections, and admirations. Society has its rules, which must be recognized; and our natural love and esteem have their own place. They are wholesome on the whole. They are based on merit, on character; and they should be. They must rest on something of which men and women can take cognisance. It is men and women that are the judges. The vice of Pharisaism (as it was Israel's ruin) is that it makes the divine standard the same in its nature; it puts merit everywhere and grace nowhere; it makes the divine ideal to be a matter of our achievement, the divine favour a reward for our goodness; it makes the divine

welcome to turn on what we have done, or on what we have grown to be, instead of on faith in the grace which delights to make new men out of our worthlessness and our impotence to grow at all. The saints, in the New Testament, are not the saintly but the believing. What Christ always demanded of those who came to Him was not character, not achievement, but faith, trust. His standard was not *conduct*, it was not *character*, it was not *creed*. It was faith in Himself as God's Grace. It was trust, and trust not in His manner but in His message, His gospel. That was the one demand of God; and to answer it is perfection. Obedience to God's one comprehensive demand must be perfection. "This is His commandment, that ye should believe in Jesus Christ." That is to say, *perfection is not sanctity but faith*. It is the obedience which *is* faith. Do not miss the real point. Perfection is obedience. Good. Rome says that. It is the obedience of faith. Rome says that too. She says it is that obedience to the Church which grows out of belief in the Church. No! The obedience of faith is not the obedience which grows out of faith, but the obedience which faith is, which constitutes the act of faith, in which it consists. It is that surrender of the *will* which is involved in the act of personal faith in the living, saving Person of Jesus Christ. That is Christian perfection. All other excellence flows from that. All ideal perfection is latent in that. All moral character, all sanctity, is in its germ in that. The man of faith is perfect before God because his will and person is in the relation to God which is God's will for him. And he has the germ and the conditions which will work out in sanctifying time to ethical perfection as well. But that holy perfection, that perfection of character, is there already to the eye of God, Who sees the end in the beginning, and the saint in the penitent.

Let no mistake linger, then, in your minds. Christian perfection is the perfection not of conduct, character, or creed, but of faith. It is not a matter of our behaviour before God the Judge, but of our relation to God the Saviour. Whatever lays the first stress on behaviour or achievement; on orthodoxy, theological, moral, or social; on conformity to a system, a church, a moral type, or a code of conduct; on mere sinlessness, blamelessness, propriety, piety, or sanctity of an unearthly

type,—that is a departure from the Gospel idea of perfection; which is completeness of trust, and the definite self-assignment of faith amid much imperfection. To put these things, which are of second and third rank, into the first place, as we have been doing, is to get the soil ready for all the crop that Rome can so skilfully rear. It is the Catholic débris left in Protestantism. It is a nomistic, synergistic survival from mediæval theology. It is the Protestant contribution to the Catholic reaction of the day. Once grant Rome's premises, and her use of them is masterly. Once place religious perfection outside of personal faith in God's grace in Christ, and Rome is master of the situation and of the world. In a word, Christian perfection is the faith which justifies, puts you right with God; it is not culture and sanctification by effort. Sanctification is not a perfection added to justification. It is the spirit of it drawn out, that perfection which is all there latent (and to God's eye patent) in justifying faith. The faith that seizes Christ and makes Him its own already holds perfection.

Faith! Hold, understand, define it well. It is the condition of the Church's salvation and the State's. Do not waste your antagonism upon inferior dangers and false opposites. Some of us, perhaps, are easily excited about ritual. We dread its incoming as the stealing in of Rome. The grand old warfare of our fathers (who really understood the case), in the name of faith against *works*, has dwindled into a squabble among us about Protestantism and *ritual*, as if ritualism were the great peril to Protestantism. That is being led by the eye, not by the mind and not by the soul, by sight and not by insight. All worship, however Protestant, must have some ritual. It is ritual to stand to sing, and bend, or kneel, to pray. It is ritual to have a fixed order of service. The question of a little more ritual or a little less is a small one. A greater question is what is *meant* by the ritual, be it less or more. Is it the ritual of a minister or of a priest? That is the point. It is not: ritual or no ritual. To have a minister at all is to have a ritual. The real question is as to the place of ritual, small or great, in salvation. Does salvation depend on the acts done either by the congregation or in its name—upon sacraments? And the subtlest question of all is about a kind of ritual which seldom strikes the anti-ritualists as the great peril—I mean

the ethical ritual of life, conduct, human acts, and achievements of any kind, however good, offered to God as our hope of salvation and ground of welcome. Paul, Luther, the Puritans, saw this real, large, subtle meaning of ritual. The ritual question was to them a mere phase of the great battle of grace and merit, faith and works. When Paul condemned salvation by works, perfection by the law, was he only thinking of the ceremonial law? No. It was all one law for him. The law was a unity, including the Decalogue as well as the priestly code. He found no more salvation in the Ten Commandments than in circumcision. His protest was against salvation by conduct, salvation by doing things, perfection by character, welcome by merit, by anything except absolute trust in the work of Christ as the grace of God. Our chief danger to-day is not the ceremonial ritual, but the moral and social ritual. It is the idea that men are to be saved by well-doing, by integrity, by purity, by generosity, by philanthropy, by doing as Christ did rather than trusting what Christ did, by loving instead of trusting love. We object to the mass because Christ's sacrifice cannot be repeated. But self-sacrifice, which *only imitates* Christ instead of sacrificing the self to Christ, which would die *with* Him before it has died *to* Him, is the same spirit as Rome lives on. It asks what Christ would do rather than what He is doing. It is doing as Christ did without appropriating what He did. It is ethical ritualism rather than spiritual service, copying the Lord's death Who has gone rather than showing it forth till He come. That is the frame of mind which is *in spirit* so akin to Rome, even while its antagonism may be bitter against Rome; whose presence in the air develops all the Roman germs in our semi-Reformation. Wherever you find the idea that the *first* condition or the *true* response to God's grace is *doing something*, there you have the habit of mind from which Rome has everything to gain and Christianity at last everything to lose. The "Christian Agnosticism" which we are assured is the religious tone of the Universities offers more to Rome than to faith. And the way in which the public mind has become misled and trivialised in this question may be seen thus. You will find that some who are most ready to say, "A fig for belief! give me character and con-

duct," are the very people who are most suspicious about ritual in church, even when it only contributes to the decencies of worship. It is the old story of boggling at a midge and swallowing a camel. And what is the hope for Protestantism when the spiritual sense is so perverted, so externalized, so lost to the real and relative value of things? Such ethical ritualism is really more dangerous to the Protestant principle of Faith than much ceremonial.

Most ministers will know that what I say is true. And many laymen may complain that they do not know what I mean. So much has the rejection of theology destroyed the sense of the real situation in the *haute politique* of the Spirit, and the great issues of the Kingdom.

Your faith (that is, your soul) may be perfected when everything else is very crude and fragmentary. Your attainments even in grace may be very poor, but your faith may be perfect. You may utterly trust Him Who saves to the uttermost. You may perfectly trust your perfect Lord, and charge Him with the responsibility both for your sin and your sanctification. The perfectness of their trust is the only perfect thing about some; but it gives them a perfection which people envy who are far richer in attainment and repute. Perfect faith is possible to some who, with many excellences, have no other perfection whatever. There are imperfect human beings whom we perfectly trust and love. There are faulty wives and husbands, parents and children, lovers and friends, who perfectly trust and love each other. There is no faculty so universal as this of perfect trust. How common it is I do not say; but it is the most universal in its nature. It is possible to those who can do nothing else. The child can exercise it. You can win it from many who are the despair of every other means of culture. The savage can learn it towards his missionary, and still more towards Christ, when he is too low in the scale to acquire much from civilisation beyond its vices. The perfection of faith is the hope of a universal religion. It is the great faculty of manhood. It is the great beauty of manhood and womanhood. It is the divine thing in love. It is the soul of marriage, whether of man and woman, or of mankind to Christ. Faith is the marriage of God's perfection and man's. It is the union of the

perfection which is absolute and eternal with the perfection which is relative and perfectly *grows*. It is the human ideal, the supreme exercise of human faculty. It is an incessant demand on us, and it is an opportunity not for an elect but for all, not for a caste but for the soul.

*P.S.*—I regret that space does not allow me to enlarge the point, so grave and subtle now, which I have touched in the note on page 63. As I have dwelt on the effects of religious ethicism, so I should like to have drawn explicit attention to the Catholicising effect of a pietism which *practically* makes sanctity the first thing and faith only second, and would think more of Faber than say, Livingstone. This quietism is a *pax Romana* in its inner nature and long result. There is a thirst for "consecration" which is not the true way to holiness; and a worship of saintliness which impairs the great sanctity.

## III

## GROWTH AND PERFECTION

"Not as though I were already *perfected*."—PHIL. iii. 12.
"Let us who are *perfect* be thus minded."—PHIL. iii. 15.

A distinguished Frenchman has said that the idea of perfection is more to men than examples of it, and that this is equally so in art and morals.

In religion, it might be added, what we need more than either the idea or the example is the guarantee of perfection.

In morals, in character, the aphorism is certainly true. The love of perfection is more precious than the sight of it. An *example* of perfection often ties us down to a literal imitation of his manner of life, instead of kindling us to a fellowship of his spirit. This has happened with Christ Himself. He has been so treated as our perfect Example that His outward fashion of life has been copied at the cost of His inward principle. His poverty, celibacy, and freedom from civic duties—such things have been copied as if they were divine ends for every man, instead of means for a particular man's particular work. And the monks, thinking more of imitating Christ than of trusting Christ, lost the way of life in Christ's mere way of living. They lost the mind of Christ, and the true sense of Christ's unique saving work, till the Reformers set things mightily right. The *idea* of perfection, on

the contrary, is a constant call to escape, through all the ascending forms in which perfection has been expressed, into sympathy with the principle that struggled in them to light. Every finite perfection is outgrown as the infinite is more fully revealed. The very Christ after the flesh becomes inadequate to the Christ according to the Spirit. He had to be broken and die for His full scope. He entered maimed into His eternal life. The earthly life of Christ was perfect in this sense, that it was perfectly ruled and ordered by His task, it was perfectly adapted at each stage to carry out *His* purpose in the world, and to finish the work given Him to do. The same manner of life would not be perfect, or even useful, for you or me, to whom His work of Redemption is not given. But there is a sense in which Christ lives more perfectly in His Church to-day than He did in the form of His thirty years on earth. He is more universal, more free from limitations of time and space, more invisible in His action, less exposed to the risks of Messianic misconception. We are less tempted to do exactly as He did, and we are better taught to trust what He did, and then let our faith take a free, spontaneous, and individual form in our social life to His praise. What a thinker in art or morals may call the idea of perfection, that *we* call the Spirit of faith and fellowship. And our faith and fellowship in Christ is worth far more for our perfection than any effort to live up to Him as our example—useful as that may be. We are complete in Him, not merely by His help but by His indwelling. We are organized into Him. It is better, of course, to imitate the example of Christ than to be conformed to the world. But it is better to trust Christ and His work than even to imitate Him. He is worth infinitely more to the world as its Saviour than as its model, as God's promise than as man's ideal. He is more to be admired than copied, more to be loved than to be admired, and He is to be trusted more than all. This trust of Christ is the highest thing a man can do. Trust become habitual is our new nature, our perfection made perfect, our life and abiding in Him.

When Christ bids us be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect, He does not tell us to do what the Father does. The Father makes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on just and unjust. We cannot do that. We cannot

affect sun or rain. We cannot copy God. He is Almighty as we are not. He is, to our great blessing, unseen. To our great blessing Christ is now unseen also. If we could see them we might be copying them, or trying and failing. What they do we know not now. Their method of procedure in the world we cannot trace, else we might ruin their plans by poor imitations of them which would be no more than parodies, like Sheldon's tales.* We are not told to do *what* God does, but *as* He does. It is sympathy that is wanted more than imitation. What we are to imitate is the love and grace of God. And there is only one way of imitating that, only one way of learning it. It is by trusting Him. Love is learned by faith in the case of the unseen. With our visible lovers faith may come by love. With the Lover of our souls love comes by faith. Love of the unseen is the girdle of perfectness which is put on over the other garments of faith and hope and all the virtues, and after them, as the last touch which keeps them all in form and place. The art of loving God is that perfection of educated *character*, that actual righteousness which is the result of long *sanctification*. But faith is that perfection of soul attitude to God, of rightness in relation to Him, which is our *justification*, our ideal righteousness, what used to be called an imputed righteousness. There is a perfection of faith before the character has grown up under it, and that is justification. This is the perfection that makes the Church. The saints in the New Testament are not the fully sanctified, but the believers. The Church to-day is not a company of the sanctified, but of the justified. They have only entered on their Christian manhood, they have not fully developed it. They are but spiritual adults, not spiritual heroes. And in the main, when the New Testament speaks of the perfect, it means not the complete but the spiritually adult; not the fully sanctified but the duly justified. They are not people who perfectly love, but who truly trust. They may be defective as yet in many points of character, or relations to each other. But they have entered on the right relation to Christ. They are not all ideal characters. Some are not even beautiful. But they will become so in time or eternity. They have started on that

* The Rev. Charles Sheldon, of Kansas, U.S.A., author of *In His Steps*, *circa* 1900.

career. They have come to spiritual adultness by faith in Christ, as I say. They have entered on their spiritual vocation. But they have not yet reached spiritual distinction, when faith has its perfect work in love. Faith, therefore, in a sense is more than character because it makes character; and it is perfect before it makes character. But it is less than character, in the sense that the character may be only latent in it and not yet made.

The perfect, then, are those who by faith have settled into their divine place in the perfect Christ and become spiritually of age. You know the difference between a youth and an adult. There is a step taken in life, a step hard to describe and various in its ways, by which the boy passes into the man, the girl into the woman. They are held fit for a share in things to which they were not admitted before. They become initiates in life where before they had been novices. They cease, as it were, to be catechumens of Humanity and become members. They graduate. They are held fit to begin their real education. They are admitted to new circles, to new responsibilities, new rights even in law. Things are discussed with them which are not discussed with boys and girls. They acquire more or less common sense. They become capable of learning from life, instead of fluttering about in it, or drifting. They stand on a new footing, they are ready for burdens, they are expected to cease being carried and to begin to carry. The soul, as it were, comes to itself, settles into being itself. Its organism becomes complete even if faculty is not. The natural character reveals itself in a distinct way. I do not mean that all this takes place just when people become legally of age—at eighteen or twenty-one. With some it may be about then, with some later. I only mean that there is a time when the natural character passes out of the condition of crudity, and rawness, and comparative imperfection, and enters a stage of firmness, setness, and comparative perfection. It is true of the body, of the stature, and it is true of the character and the will. They become knit, compact, individual, characteristic. That is becoming adult. It is a step which is never repeated in life. And yet it is not a final step by any means. It is a perfecting of the organism—the bodily organism or the psychical, the moral, organism, —but it is not the perfecting of the character. It is the end of an

age, but it is also the beginning of an age. Perfecting though it be, it is more of a start than a close—like marriage, which only in comedies ends all, but in reality begins all, the serious part of life. We become not so much perfect in the ordinary sense as *habiles*, capable, possible. When St Paul says, "We speak wisdom among the perfect," he meant that he was talking as he would to spiritual *men* and not to hobbledehoys. He cast himself on their spiritual adultness, common sense, wisdom. It is as when Christ said, "I speak as unto wise men; judge ye what I say." What Paul meant was that, as he was not addressing the celestial and sanctified intelligences, so neither was he providing milk for babes, but speaking as a man to men in Christ Jesus.

Now it is a corresponding thing that takes place in the soul by faith. It is well to get rid of the idea that faith is a matter of spiritual *heroism*, only for a few select spirits. There are heroes of faith, but faith is not only for heroes. It is a matter of spiritual manhood. It is a matter of maturity. I have not used the word maturity, because it is ambiguous. It might be taken to mean the final fulness of power as well as the initial adequacy of power. Faith is the condition of spiritual maturity in the sense of adultness, of entering on the real heritage of the soul. It is the soul coming to itself, coming of age, feeling its feet, entering on its native powers. Faith is perfection in this sense. It is not ceasing to grow, but entering on the real and normal region of growth. It is starting on a progress through the scale of perfections. It is going on from strength to strength. Growth is then progress, not *to* Christ, but *in* Christ.

I have not said that in *every* case in the New Testament this adultness, this coming of age, is the meaning of the word perfection. There are cases where it does have reference to some comparatively final stage of sanctification which is the goal of infinite hope in Jesus Christ. It means, sometimes, the state in which faith has worked out into love of God and man, into spiritual blessing and beauty, the abiding in Christ. Spiritual adultness and sanctification are not two perfections, but two aspects of the same perfection, which is the faithful soul's progress in faith to love. There is a bold passage in St Paul (Phil. iii. 12), which makes this very clear. The two aspects of perfection

meet in a point. He says he is not yet perfect, but in the next breath (v. 15) he says he is perfect: "as many of you as are perfect be like me." That is saved from being vanity by the fact that perfection is as conscious of what it is not as of what it is. If you are in the right and perfect relation to Christ, go on to be perfected in Christ. If you are in the way of Christ, let Christ have His way with you. It is your perfection to be in a position in which you are always being perfected. You are perfect when you feel that Christ has everything to do to perfect you. To *believe* in Christ, to *be* in Christ, and to *abide* in Christ, are three stages of the same perfection—which you may call the Petrine, the Pauline and the Johannine stages if you will. A man is perfect when he comes to belong to Christ instead of himself. But he has for his goal, as Christ's property, a perfection in which perfection itself is perfected. A man as a Christian has entered on perfect manhood, but he must always become more and more so. Boys have amused themselves with the puzzle—how can the adjective perfect be compared? If a thing is perfect, can it be more perfect, or most? Well, if we were all circles, I suppose there would be no improvement possible. We should be complete—and empty. A perfect circle is done with. There could be no comparative degree. We should all be then what some believe themselves to be now—incomparable. But dead and done with. Unless, indeed, some ambitious circle had its life poisoned by the passion to rotate on its diameter and become a sphere. But if we were all perfect spheres we should be capable, I suppose, of no more perfection. We should be finished futilities. But as living souls our great perfection is the power of continually becoming what we are, coming to our true selves. As Christian souls, our perfection is in coming to ourselves in Christ. We are perfect in Christ, and in Him continually more so. In Christ we are what we are to be—not in the sense in which a closed figure is all it can be, but in the sense in which the perfect seed has the promise and power of the perfect tree. Eternity is packed in our small souls. It is set in our heart. We are what we have to become. That is what gives faith its power and peace. In faith we are not panting, and straining, and rending ourselves after a perfection only ideal, possible, remote, and ever receding. We are not toiling to put

achievement on the head of achievement, or mortification on the back of mortification, to reach heaven. That is a war of godless giants, which ends in failure, defeat, and chagrin. But we are unfolding a perfection which we already have in fee. We are appropriating what is already ours. We are sure that it is ours before it is ours. It is in us before it is on us. We have it with Christ before we have it with men. We are complete in Him before He completes Himself in us. We are perfect, and yet we are not perfect. We are as having nothing and yet possessing all things. We are in Christ, therefore we are complete; but we are in the world too, therefore we are not complete, but only on the way to completion. Our perfection, therefore, is not to be flawless, but to be in tune with our redeemed destiny in Christ. We are perfect, if not sinless. We are in Christ, even if we do not *yet* abide in Him. We are in the only relation which is capable of being perfected—the relation of faith. Faith as perfection is conformity to our high calling, which is also an upward calling. It is a perfection which both is and *grows*. True perfection is the power of perfect growth. But that does not mean unbroken growth. There are times when we lie becalmed, times when we have to tack, times when the current carries us astern, times when we are buffeted out of the straight course—when it is much if only we can keep at sea and not go to pieces on the rocks. Ignorance misleads us. Our charts fail us. Our crew mutinies, our passions take command, for a time. But, on the whole, we are on the living way. The master passion and bias of the soul is to Christ. The ruling will is the will of God, however certain impulses escape its control. We may still sin, but we are not sinners. Sin clings, soils, and may sometimes master. There are lapses, repentances, renewed forgivenesses. True perfection is not the power of unbroken growth, but of growing unto perfection, growing on the whole. The judgment is passed on our life-work as a whole. God does not judge us in pieces. He sees our life steadily, and sees it whole. The ship may be battered, but it comes to port, even though scarcely saved.

This note of growth is the most remarkable thing about Christian perfection. It has to sound so paradoxical, in order to be true. But, it is asked, does the perfect God grow? We are

bidden to be perfect as He is perfect; is His perfection a thing of growth? No, indeed. The absolute God has all perfection in Him in actual completeness from first to last. We do not read that we are bidden to aim at any of the absolute qualities of God. That would be the old temptation, "Ye shall be as gods." How near the devilish suggestion lies to the divine, temptation to inspiration, "Be as gods" to "Be ye perfect." Our perfection is not to be rival absolutes, but to love and trust the absolute. Be as perfect in your relative way as God is in His absolute way, which contains all relatives. Be as perfect men as He is perfect God. Meet God's will about you in Christ as fully as God meets His own will about Himself in Christ. And the union of will and nature in God is by love. It is not, Be perfect fathers, but, Be sons worthy of a perfect Father. But is it such a strange and foolish thing, this perfection which is and is not, but only is to be? It is a mystery, but must it be a folly? It is noble to strive. But would it be so noble if there were not a perfection *in* our striving as well as *by* it, if we were not perfect while striving as well as while attaining? Is a perfect quest not part of our perfect good? If there were only perfection in attaining by striving, would not striving, effort, be outside the perfect life, or all perfection removed to another life? Is our striving not a part of our perfection? Is our perfection not, by the very nature and sanctity of effort, a growing thing?

Take an illustration also from your own personality. Go back ten, twenty years. Were you the same person as you are to-day? Yes, and no. Yes. For it was you then, as it is you now. There is something continuous. There is an identity which nothing can destroy. We do not believe that even death can destroy it. But also, No. You are not the same. A great deal has come and gone, and you are changed. You have grown better or worse, but you have changed. Every day has changed you, and made you not the man you were; you are either more worthy of your personality, or less. *There* is a case, apart from the life of faith, a case from mere natural life, of the same mystery of at once being and not being, of being the same yet not the same. You are a perfect personality in the sense that you are distinct from all others, adult, complete in yourself, continuous in your history,

and so far consistent with yourself that you are the same person now as long ago. Yet this perfection to which personality has come in you is quite compatible with a constant change and growth. So much so, indeed, that if you had ceased to change and grow it could only have been by the dissolution of your personality itself. You only *are* because of your power to *become* what you are, to *grow*. Incessant growth is a condition of perfect living personality.

Again, take goodness. If a man say, "I am now good, my moral education is finished," it means that he gives up effort, gives up pursuing goodness. And that means that he ceases to be good. He has lost in the boast of possessing it the very thing he had. He has it only by a deep sense that he has it not but must always pursue it, win it, enlarge it, let it grow. That is true in the region of natural morality. It is still more true in Christ. We are only perfect in Him as we are in a condition to grow in Him.

Take, again, happiness. If you arrive at a condition in which you settle down and say, "I will fix this day for ever so," your happiness is doomed. "Stay thus for ever, for thou art so fair." The soul that says that to any earthly state has stood still with all the spiritual world moving. And the meaning of that must soon be that he is out of harmony with the world, and so happiness is gone. Happiness is a power of the soul to find its joy amid the constant change of experience, and to grow in mastery of a growing world.

So with culture and its love of the perfect. If it do not feel with the living time and grow to it, all its acquisitions become mere lore, mere pedantry.

So with character. If you freeze at the perfection of twenty or thirty, your character ceases to live and becomes mere mechanism, mere habit, prejudice, set grey life, moral death, and apathetic end.

You may ascend with the illustration to the character of Christ Himself. In what did His perfection consist? Those three years that we know—were they no more than the dramatic display of a perfection which was all finished before they began? Were they only like a photograph enlarged and thrown on a screen for the world to see—enlarged from a completed perfection existing in

small in the Saviour's own soul? Or were they the perfection of real growth, the perfection of the growing life? In doing what He did for us, was He not doing something real for Himself? Surely His manifestation had in it nothing mechanical, nothing stagey. He was perfect at every point. That is, at every stage He was in perfect tune with the will of God. He was perfectly equal to His unique work and the call of the hour. But it was the perfection of an ever-deepening note. Neither omnipotence nor omniscience was among His perfections. They were only those that pertained to His redeeming work. At every point He was completely obedient, but it was an obedience never completed till the Cross. He was perfectly obedient from the first, but He learned obedience by the things He suffered. His problem grew deeper on His gaze, his task grew more solemn as He moved into the deadly antagonisms of His time and the upper reaches of spiritual wickedness. He saw on the paschal night a cross He did not see in the rapture of His baptism, and He accepted then a work which He did not at first realize in its full form and fear. He was not more perfect in His obedience at the end than at the beginning; but it was a more perfect perfection that He obeyed. Always perfect by faith, He was always being perfected in holiness. Always in the right relation to God, His realization of God's will and purpose with Him ever deepened, and it was ever fully met.

And take as a last illustration the Great Redemption itself which His obedience wrought. It was completed in His death. It was finished. Having died unto sin once, it was once for all. That death and conquest needs no repetition. The sacrifice of the mass is an impeachment of Christ's finished work. It needs no supplement. The whole work was in principle done, the everlasting victory was in spirit won. In the spiritual world the Cross is one long indubitable triumph of conclusive bliss; and it would be so were every mass priest paralyzed at the altar. What Christ did was a thing for ever complete and sufficient. Redemption is the condition of the world in God's eternal sight, and with it the perfect God is well pleased. With the world in the Cross, with the travail of the Redeemer's soul, He is satisfied.

But in *your* sight, actually, historically, is it a redeemed world?

To your *faith* it is; viewed from this house, from this day, from this worship, from this pulpit, it is. It is so really, but is it actually? To your *sight* is it a redeemed world? Where is the perfection of Christ's work in yesterday's newspaper, in to-morrow's business, in the actual condition to which your soul has attained to-day, in the degree of sanctification reached by those who bow with you in the faith of the Cross, and put all their faith there? Where is Redemption in current affairs, in the course of past history, in the record even of the Church itself? It is so hard to see, that if we look away from the Cross we may not perceive it at all. "And is the thing we see Salvation?" So hard to see, that even if we look at the Cross with the historian's eye alone, and not with the insight of faith, we mostly miss it. So hard to see, that even the Cross, even to faith's eye, might be ambiguous were its divine meaning not verified by the Resurrection. Yea, so hard to see, that Cross and Resurrection together might be dumb for us as to eternal issues were faith not fed by the witness of the Holy Ghost, and the Kingdom not assured by the perpetual working of its immortal King. For all the eternal and spiritual completeness of our Redemption, it is at the same time an imperfect thing, to many powerful spirits a thing denied. It is in history still, and for long must be, incomplete. It is in our experience very incomplete. An infinite perfection of Redemption is ours, and yet our Redemption is so imperfect. The work is finished, yet how unfinished are we, its products! That seems a strange and impossible thing; and the logicians might make great mirth of it were they not more than logicians—spiritual thinkers. The work is finished, not simply in the sense of being ended, but in the sense of being completed. The work is finished, not simply in the sense that the great Workman closed His day, and did His best, but in the sense that the task was completed, the end achieved, and He brought in eternal Redemption. The work is finished; but what unfinished things are we, in whom the work must take effect! Yes, Redemption is finished and unfinished, complete in heaven, incomplete on earth. Incomplete on earth, with eternal promise and power. Imperfect but no fiasco. We are complete in Him in whom His own work is always complete. He grasps us by the Eternity within us—and by the sin—to pluck

out the sin and develop the eternity. Our one perfection is to be in Him. He will perfect Himself in us in His time. Our perfection is the growing perfection of faith in His absolute redeeming perfection. We have a perfect Redemption, however imperfectly redeemed we are at any one stage. In faith we are what we can never feel ourselves perfectly to be. We are by faith what we are not, but are ever growing by grace to be.

## IV

## PRACTICAL RÉSUMÉ

I would end by resuming the more practical and experimental features of perfection.

Christian perfection cannot be thought of as an external thing, a formal thing, a thing completed and closed.

And yet our perfection must be a limited one. It is not possible for any Christian at any one time to fulfil all possible duties and realize all possible excellences. Your perfection lies in what is possible to *you* with *your* character and position, in what *you* are called to be and do, in what lies on *your* conscience, in what concerns the situation in which *you* find yourself in life. Duty is duty for A as for B. But A's duty is not B's. A's ideal of happiness is not B's. A's love is not B's. A's idiosyncrasy is not B's. A's call is not B's. There are limitations for each soul; and in those limitations lies his freedom, his perfection. An unlimited perfection is not possible. Even God is limited, though it is by Himself. But were it possible it would be a great burden on us. An unchartered freedom would only tire us. Our freedom is *our* freedom. It has the stamp of *our* character. It has a charter in our individuality, a specification, definite features, inalienable qualities, distinctive of each one of us. In our worst misery we dread parting with ourselves and ceasing to be. Our freedom and our perfection is not to be as gods but to find our place in God. And that we find by faith in Jesus Christ and growth in Him. Individual perfection is not possible, apart from the perfection of all, especially as that is antedated in Christ. And the perfection of all is that each should be a member of the other in the Kingdom of God in the faith,

service, and communion of Jesus Christ. Perfection makes his soul a whole; but it is a whole which is only perfected in *the* whole, in the Kingdom of God, under its conditions, its limitations. The most free and universal of all perfections was that of Jesus Christ. And in what narrow limits that perfection moved and grew! How it was perfected in the most awful agony and pressure of limitation the world ever knew—the weight and bondage of the Cross! In His death He was crushed under all the sorrow and sin of the world. Every master finds his opportunity and realizes his mastery in his limitations. It was the Cross of Christ that gave Him the world, the future, eternity, perfection, for a prey.

The features of Christian perfection are these. First, *faith*, as I have said. But I wish to define more Christianly the *kind* of faith. By faith I do not mean only that utterly inward transaction in which the soul forgets the world and deals with God, committing itself to Him in a high, spiritual, mystic, rapturous act. It is not the fine frenzy of religious emotion, the glow of exalted adoration and surrender. That may be in it, but that is not necessarily of it; it is not its test. There is a better test of faith than rapture. It is confidence, patience, and humility. Faith is not best expressed in boisterous assertions of assurance, however honest at the time, but in those forms of life and character. St Paul's life-faith was greater than any of the finest expressions of it in his writings—partly because he never felt carried so high but that he might become a castaway if he did not take care. "He that endureth to the end shall be saved." Tune down your heroics to that; it is really tuning them up. Faith does not make you an angel cleaving the blue sky remote from the world. It makes you a son with the Father. It is not wings it gives you, but hands and feet to grasp and to go. Look at the extremes it avoids. At one extreme you may have incessant worry and care; at the other you have a carelessness about all the world so long as you are shut in with your religious dreams. Or at one end you have indifference, weak, spiritless, or desperate; at the other you have Stoic indifference, strong and proud. Faith is none of these things. It is filial trust in God's love, redemption, and providence amidst the duties, affections, pleasures, enterprises, perils, fears, guilts,

gains, losses of active life. I do not say it is simple trust. It is not so simple, in the sense of being easy. You know well enough it is not easy to rise up out of those cares, absorptions, perplexities, impotences of yesterday's work to a simple faith to-day. The greatest simplicities are not easy. And the simplicity of faith embodies all the difficulty of Christ with the modern world. And faith is not a piece of self-control. Nor is it a particular experience of life, or insight into life, like a genius's. It rests on an experience of Jesus Christ and God's grace in Him. It rests in God amid much ignorance; though we do not know the future, and do not understand the past. It saves us from being victims of the world. It gives us mastery over it. It is the soul of sonship. It consists more of obedience and quiet confidence than of visions. And at the last it approves itself better (as I say) in *humility* and *patience* than in ecstasies. It is more faith to cleave to God in the dark hour of life and the dull commonness of duty than to throw ties, duties, services away, and seek a religion principally of sweet seasons and uplifted states. It is better to trust God in humiliated repentance than to revel in the sense of sinlessness. It is better to bear the chastening of the Lord as sons than to feel in the angelic mood of those who know they need no repentance. It is better to come home weeping than to stay at home self-satisfied.

It is not very often, comparatively, that the New Testament writers offer Christ as our example. But when they do, it is almost always in connection with His humility and patience and self-sacrificing love. It is His spirit, His faith and love, that are our example, not His conduct, not His way of life.

*Humility* is a frame of perfect mind not possible except to faith. It is no more depression and poverty of spirit than it is loud self-depreciation. It rests on our deep sense of God's unspeakable gift, on a deep sense of our sin as mastered by God, on a deep sense of the Cross as the power which won that victory. It is not possible where the central value of the Cross is forgotten, where the Cross is only the glorification of self-sacrifice instead of the atonement for sin. A faith that lives outside the atonement must lose humility, as so much Christian faith in a day like this has lost it, as so much worship has lost awe. It is very hard, unless we are really and inly broken with Christ on the Cross, to keep

from making our self the centre and measure of all the world. This happens even in our well-doing. We may escape from selfishness, but it is hard to escape from a subtle egotism which it is not quite fair to call selfish. This personal masterfulness of ours needs mastering. In many respects it is very useful, but it must go ere God in Christ is done with us. And it is mastered only by the Cross as the one atonement for sin.

Humility is a great mystery to itself. It is the amazement of the redeemed soul before itself, or rather before Christ in itself. It may take the shape of modesty before men, or it may not; humility is not anything which we have in the sight or thought of other men at all. It is the soul's attitude before God. "Hast thou that faith? Have it unto thyself" before God. It can take very active, assertive, and even fiery shape in dealing with men. It is not timidity or nervousness. It is not shy, not embarrassed, not hesitant, not self-conscious, not ill at ease, not a seeker of back seats or a mien of low shoulders and drooping head. Yet it is not self-sufficient in a proud and Stoic reserve, nor self-assertive in a public Pharisee fashion. It can never be had either by imitating the humble or by mortifying the flesh. Devotion is not humility, though humility is devout. It is only to be had by the mastery of the Cross which taketh away the self-wrapt guilt of the world.

With humility goes *patience* as a supreme confession of faith. Do not think that patience is a way of bearing trouble only. It is a way of doing work—especially the true secret of not doing too much work. It is a way of carrying success. It is not renouncing will and becoming careless. It is an act of will. It is a piece of manhood. To part with will is to become a *thing*. It is not mere resignation or indifference—which often goes with despair and not faith. It is a form of energy, even when it curbs energy. It is Christian form of bravery, and it has the valour often to be called cowardice. It is the form of energy that converts suffering, and even helplessness, into action.

> "I am ready not to do
> At last, at last."

It is the intense form of action which made the power of the

Cross, and stamped the example of Christ in the deepest way on the mind and heart of the first Church.

Both humility and patience are only Christian in the spirit of *thankfulness*. Faith is for the Christian enveloped in praise. It is no gloomy humility, no sombre patience, no dull endurance, no resentful submission. It is all clothed with hope. It is the faith and submission of a soul that knows itself both immortal and redeemed, and owes all to God's purely marvellous grace. Its atmosphere is glad hope. Christian public worship begins much more fitly with thanksgiving than confession; it should open as well as close with a doxology. And the central act of Christian worship is the Eucharist—which is thanksgiving. The spirit of Christian life and worship is thanks and praise. Whatever we offer to God, were it life and health itself, is offered in the name of Christ, in sequel to His Cross, as the joyful response to our redemption there. You can never doubt, when you actually see the thankfulness and sweetness in some life-long martyrs and sufferers, that that is the true Christian victory, whatever the failures of their life may have been. *There* is a perfection never won by culture, art, or any success.

The next feature of perfection is *prayer*—prayer as a habit, joy, and prize of life. Humility takes the form of reverence and yet communion. The heart converses with God in Christ. It offers thanks, it confesses sin, it makes its petitions, but it above all converses with God. That is the inmost energy of faith—prayer. It is faith's habit of heart. All *acts* of prayer become but expressions of this *habit*. Work goes to this tune. Everything rises to God's throne. Everything the child does has a reference to the father, direct or indirect. Every form of prayer is speech with with God the Father and Redeemer. "Praise is the speech of faith, petition is the speech of hope, intercession is the speech of love, confession is the speech of repentance."

A further feature of Christian perfection is *duty*. Humility takes shape as devotion to the will of God in the natural and social order that holds us. It is daily duty in our relations and calling. If it is a calling God cannot bless, it is not for you. If He can bless it, it is a contribution to Him. And it is duty in the wide sense. It is the duty, not of your business or family only,

but of your social and civic position. Distrust the religion that makes you careless of social duties, public rights, and civic faithfulness. How is society to be converted if conversion take men out of society? How is the Kingdom to come if all the good are only "saints", if the "saint" is a ruling caste among believers, and piety is more than faith? A man's duty to the public does not justify him in neglecting his wife; but his duties to his family do not justify him in neglecting the public. A man's religious duties are only partly met by the observances of his religion. All the duties of his position are religious. And it is a perfection of another than the Christian kind that makes the Church the one field of God's perfect will for him. That carries us back to Romanism, and monkhood, and the double morality of the religious and the lay. What is called Church work may be sacred enough; but it is not in its nature more sacred than the Christian's doing of the world's work in his place and calling unto God in Christ.

And the last feature of Christian perfection is *love*, and especially love to man. I have spoken of love to God. That may be a passion. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, soul, strength, and mind." But the love of man is less so. It is at least less of an emotion than a principle, and especially a principle of action. "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." But self-love is not an emotion so much as a principle, a habit of mind and action. So with the love of men. When will the public learn that that is not necessarily a tenderness of mood or manner? These have been lacking in some of the great lovers of their kind, and the dutiful assumption of them is a fertile source of Pharisaism. Love is not mere natural benevolence. It is not easy compliance. It does not consist in giving alms or gifts. Its type is rather the family love that grows up unmarked as a part of us than the passionate love of man and woman, which we fall into, and which seizes us with a mighty hand. It is a principle and habit of heart and conscience, a frame or temper of life which steadily desires the welfare of men, and especially their salvation, as if it were our own. It is anxious and considerate justice at the least, especially in the public form. And it rises to be much more. Love's desire is not to please but to bless. It can be loud, and even

sharp, when needful, as well as kind and easily entreated. It shines through our behaviour to men even when we seek to do no more for them than is involved in our daily calling. It lurks in our words, our acts, our look, our whole way of intercourse. It does not always appear at first. It comes home to you sometimes only when you have known the man for years; whereas the false thing takes at the outset, and then wears thin. It does not come and go with men's behaviour. It is not easily offended. It is fed from another source than men's appreciation—at the Cross of the misprized Christ. It is there prepared for being misunderstood, uncomprehended—and still going on. When men have ceased to be lovable for their own sake, it finds a new Humanity welling up in Christ, and keeping the heart sweet at that eternal spring.

It is this love that is the perfection of Christ. We do not really know Christ till we find it in Him and toward Him. It is inimitable in Him, yet communicable. It cannot be copied, but it can be conveyed. It cannot be presented to us, yet it can be learned. You cannot feel it in Him without its tending to make itself felt in you to others. You cannot trust His love and righteousness without gaining the disposition to trust love and justice above all things everywhere. Why do so few people in Christendom really trust love as the ruling power in mankind? Because Christ is not for them a real personality, loving and loved; because they have been taught to seek Christian perfection in the completeness of some institution, or the maintenance of some law, or the fever about some conviction. Something Christian is the object of their enthusiasm more than Christ. Something Christian more than Christ is the object of their faith. A conviction about Christ or His Church, held with great warmth, is not the love of Christ. Nor is it really the faith of Christ. These things are more the work of men than the free gift of God. And they cannot act on men as the free grace and love-charm of God only can. All these things belong to a lower stage of religion than Christ, to some kind of law religion, some kind of salvation by doing something some kind of self-redemption or salvation by character or achievement. What we need is the personal impression of Christ, the personal sense of His cross, the fresh, renewing, vitalizing,

sweetening contact of His soul in its wisdom, its tenderness, its action for us—and all so freely for us, so mercifully, so persistently, so thoroughly. What we need is the touch, the communion of that kind of perfection. We need to realize how in the Cross the defeat of that sort of goodness is really its victory, its ascent to the throne of the world. The Ruler of the world must be the consummation of the world. The Judge of *all* the earth must be the Law of all the earth. And the law of all must be the secret of all its harmony and perfection.

You must let that come home to *you*, to your own peculiar case. To be perfect with God you must have Christ come *home*, come HOME, to you and sit by your central fire—come home to *you*, to YOU, as if for the moment mankind were centred in the burning point of your soul, and you touched the burning point of God's. You must court and haunt His presence till it break forth on you, and it becomes as impossible not to believe as to believe is hard now. Then we realize what we were made for, made to be redeemed; we lay hold by faith of our destiny of perfection in another; we are already in spirit what it is latent in redemption that we shall be—what some curse in our nature seemed before to forbid and thwart our being. Our dry rod blossoms. We put forth buds one after another along the line of life. We grow into a stately, seemly tree, whose boughs are for shelter and whose leaves are for healing. Our pinched hearts expand, our parched nature grows green. The fever of life is cooled. Its fret is soothed. Its powers stand to their feet. Its hopes live again. Its charities grow rich. We feel in that hour that this is what we were made for, and we are sure that we are greater than we know. We find ourselves. We lose our load. We are delivered from our plague. Our weakness is made strong. Our enemies flee before us. Our promised land is round us. Life beckons where it used to appal. And all things with us are returning, through Christ, to the perfection of God from whom they came.

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